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MEERUT CONSPIRACY CASE

MEERUT CONSPIRACY CASE & The Left-wing in India

Pramita Ghosh

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CALCUTTA 700 004 • INDIA

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PREFACE

THE majority of existing historical works dealing with India during the decades of the 1920s and the 1930s is predominantly concerned with the Nationalist movement, the Indian National Congress and its luminous leaders, the emerging Hindu-Muslim conflict and their interactions with the British administration. While undoubtedly these were some of the most vital happenings which contributed immensely in the shaping of Modern India, by no means were they the only significant events of the period. Needless to say, among the infinite number of other factors which usually mould history, scholars and historians, limited by their own time and resources, are very often forced to select some at the expense of others. As a result the above-mentioned subjects have been studied extensively from various perspectives and in different ways. A great number of general and broad-based historical works as well as detailed scholarly examinations of specific events, personalities, ideas and time periods dealing with these topics are already available.

The present study is an attempt to concentrate on one of those "other" events — a rather important historical occurrence which has so far been largely neglected in historical studies of India. The event in question is the Meerut Conspiracy Case launched by the British authorities in 1928 as a comprehensive measure against the growing threat of liberal left-wing movement in India. It was one of the most elaborate trials in British Indian history which lasted for four and a half years and involved almost the entire leadership of the young Communist and trade unionist movements of the country. For the entire period of the trial most of the accused were refused bail and despite several attempts by the defendants, a trial by jury was denied on flimsy

grounds. The Government intentionally followed a questionable procedure to ensure the conviction of the accused thereby establishing a gross instance of 'mistrial' which stands out as a rare instance of British justice in practice.

It was the longest and the most expensive trial conducted by the British Government in its whole history of colonial experience. The significance of the Meerut Conspiracy Case in the study of Indian history is enormous. First, within the Indian political scene it stands as the watershed between the early beginning of a confused and often floundering left-wing movement and the establishment of a cohesive and broad-based leftist, particularly Communist movement in India. The Communist Party of India and its political activities are not a thing of the past but are very much a reality occupying a significant part of the Indian political scene today. Any attempt to understand this phenomenon historically would be greatly enhanced by a closer look at the Meerut Conspiracy Case.

Second, the Meerut Conspiracy Case was a prime example of the British imperialist reaction to any kind of organized, revolutionary opposition or dissent which had the potential to challenge their political and economic superiority. A behind the scene look at the decision making process related to the Meerut Conspiracy Case gives interesting insight into the working of the British bureaucracy. So a study of the circumstances surrounding the whole Meerut episode adds a new dimension to the British Indian history of this period.

Third, an in-depth study of the left-wing movement in India during 1928-29 and the Meerut Conspiracy Case brings into focus some of the crucial questions regarding the relationship of the Moscow-controlled Communist International and the nascent Communist organizations in the colonial and semi-colonial countries. Such a study can be of great help to understand the relationship of the Communist and Socialist organizations of India with the powerful Indian Nationalist movement and Moscow's role in shaping and influencing this relationship.

This book is the product of my doctoral research carried out at the University of California, Santa Barbara from 1971 to 1974. The major theme and form of the dissertation have largely been retained to maintain its nature as an in-depth study

of a specific historical event within a relatively small time span. The main reason for not expanding the original study into a more generalized and broad-based work is to avoid duplication and overlapping with the already existing historical works on the general left-wing and labour movements of India.

I am deeply indebted to a large number of people without whose kind assistance (and suggestions) this work could not have been accomplished. Professor Stephen N. Hay under whose supervision my research was conducted helped me immeasurably with his patient guidance, valuable comments and the free use of his personal library. Professor Immanuel Hsu, to whom I owe a great deal as a student of the historical discipline, also provided constructive criticism and constant encouragement which enabled me to complete this study. So many of my professors and teachers deserve my thanks that it would be impossible to name them all in this short space. However among them special mention should be made of Professor G. M. Haddad and Professor Peter H. Merkl of the University of California, Santa Barbara; Professor Stanley Wolpert of the University of California, Los Angeles; Professor Sib Narayan Ray of the University of Melbourne and Professor Ingrid Aall of the California State University, Long Beach.

To my friends and teachers in India along with my whole family I shall be eternally grateful for without them I could not have accomplished much. A special thank is due to all my close friends in the United States, particularly to Dr. Sanghamitra Sen and Mr. Rao Kandukuri both of whom helped me survive some of the ordeals of a graduate student's and an aspiring scholar's life. These and all the other innumerable people, I owe my thanks to, have all contributed positively towards my efforts. However any inadequacy, deficiency or mistake in this work is totally my own responsibility.

November 1978.
San Jose, California.

P.G.

to the perfect parents
my BABU and MA

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ABBREVIATIONS

AICC	All India Congress Committee
AITUC	All India Trade Union Congress
CI	Communist International
Comintern	Communist International
C.P.	Communist Party
C.P.C.	Criminal Procedure Code
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CPI	Communist Party of India
D.I.B.	Director of Intelligence Bureau
ECCI	Executive Council of the Communist International
G.I.P.	Great Indian Peninsula
GKU	Girni Kamgar Union
I.B.	Intelligence Bureau or Intelligence Branch
I.C.S.	Indian Civil Service
I.L.O.	International Labour Organization
Inprecor	International Press Correspondence
I.P.C.	Indian Penal Code
I.P.I.	India Police Intelligence
ITUF	Indian Trade Union Federation
M.L.C.	Member of Legislative Council
M.P.	Member of Parliament
N.A.I.	National Archives of India
r.i.	rigorous imprisonment
RIN	Report on Indian Newspapers (Bombay)
RNPB	Report on Newspapers and Periodicals in Bengal
WPP	All-India Workers' and Peasants' Party

MEERUT CONSPIRACY CASE

Introduction

THE period 1928-29 was a very significant one in Indian history for various reasons. The nationalists, after a lapse of activities, renewed their actions in their bid for *swaraj* (independence) against the British *raj*. Another significant feature was the beginning of an organized left-wing movement, with both economic and political components. A rapid acceleration took place in the organization of trade unions, enabling workers to express their grievances and strive for better working conditions and higher wages. The stirring on the labour front coincided with the increased activities on the part of the Communists to establish themselves securely in India. The Communist International from Moscow as well as the European Communist Party centers initiated and carried out well-designed schemes to stabilize the Communist movement within the country. Although the Communist Party of India was formally established earlier and a handful of Indian Communists were already working to gain recognition in India, the movement did not gain any real significance before 1927. It was only after 1927, and especially in 1928-29, that the Communists achieved considerable success in their efforts to infiltrate the trade union and the labour organizations as well as to win over the youth movement and a powerful section of the nationalist ranks to their cause. Although the Communist efforts were not spectacularly successful at this time, the period witnessed the beginning of a broadly-based and well-organized left-wing political movement in the country for the first time.

As the left-wing movement gained momentum in India, the British Government's concern grew correspondingly, and they undertook a series of actions, to nip the movement in the bud. Of the various measures carried out the most significant and historic was the launching of a large scale conspiracy trial against thirty-two of the leading left-wing labour leaders at Meerut. The trial had far-reaching significance for the future of the Communist Party of India and on the whole left-wing movement of the country in general.

A word of explanation regarding the use of the term "left-wing" seems in order at this point. The dictionary meaning of the word connotes, "a complex of industrial or organizational groups advocating liberal reform or revolutionary change in the social, political or economic order usually on behalf of greater personal freedom or improved social conditions."¹ In the context of India during the period under consideration the term has been used rather loosely to include two overlapping phenomena : The organization of industrial labour in the economic front, and a socio-political movement aimed at governmental and social changes which would favour the working class in general. Even though theoretically the two can be differentiated, and the words "Socialist" and "Communist" could be applied most closely to the economic and political aspects, respectively, in the actual workings, however, very often they were diffused and indistinguishable. The main features of the Indian "left-wing" which distinguished it from the other movements in the country were :

- (i) politically, its more radical, militant, revolutionary, uncompromising, and anti-imperialist attitude ;
- (ii) its refusal to regard the national movement as a mere political movement for freedom and consequently, its efforts to connect it with the broad socio-economic demands of the working class people of India ;
- (iii) its greater faith in violence ; and
- (iv) its belief in and links with the international socialist movement based on Marxian socialism.

The organizations and groups which generally shared these characteristics have been collectively referred to as the "left-wing" and their general trend of action and belief as "leftism" in the present study.

Several scholarly studies dealing separately with the Communist movement and the Labour and Trade Union movements of India are already in existence. However, surprisingly no in-depth study of the left-wing movement of the 1928-29 period or of the Meerut Conspiracy Case in particular have been undertaken so far, even though their importance is generally acknowledged by scholars. It is believed that such a study will contribute to a better understanding of modern Indian history. Fortunately, a wealth of information and official documents have recently been made available to the public by the Government of India through the National Archives in New Delhi. The police reports and other official letters and documents thus acquired and used in the present study throw significant light upon the scene, especially clarifying the line of reasoning followed by the British officials, both in India and in London, in their efforts to deal with the growing left-wing movement in India during 1928-29.

The present work takes a close-up look at the events of 1928-29, studying the left-wing developments in the country for the period, as well as the circumstances which gave rise to them. The Meerut Conspiracy Case itself has been taken as the central theme and a number of pertinent questions with regard to it have been raised and answers to them attempted. The approach taken in this study is not strictly chronological throughout since the main thrust of the work concentrates on a limited time period and a topical rather than chronological approach is considered more appropriate to the subject matter. The dividing point has been taken as the date March 20, 1929, on which day the arrests of the labour leaders took place. The first two chapters deal with the period prior to the arrests (from January, 1928 to March 20, 1929) and the main structural division is topically distributed under two heads : the left-wing developments within the country, and the British Government's reactions and activities in response to them in the same time span. The first chapter examines in detail the various left-wing groups and their activities, their accelerated growth in stature and importance, and their relations with the Communists, the Communist International, and the nationalist movement in the country. In short, it attempts to answer the question why and how did the left-wing become so prominent in India and what was the relation-

ship of its leaders to the other contemporary political interest groups on the scene.

The second chapter deals primarily with the official views and reactions to the above developments. The British Government's increasing concern with the leftists and the various measures undertaken by them to meet with the new situation are examined in detail. A major portion of this section follows the lengthy and complicated process of decision making in the Government with regard to the launching of the Meerut Conspiracy Case. The various views and arguments that were offered by different responsible sections of the Government in complete confidentiality are examined in detail to understand exactly why and how the Meerut trial was launched.

The third and the fourth chapters cover the months following the Meerut arrests (from March 21, 1929 to December, 1929) once again following the same topical division as in the previous two chapters. Chapter three focuses on the repercussions of the arrests both at home and abroad. The reactions were surprisingly strong and were not merely confined to the leftists in India, but were expressed also in India, in Great Britain, and in the Soviet Union. The chapter also looks at the further developments of left-wing activities in India during the immediate post-Meerut arrest stage and at the changing relationship between the leftists and the nationalists in the country.

The fourth chapter once again scrutinizes the Government's actions and stand towards the left-wing following the Meerut arrests. It also covers the beginning of the Meerut trial and takes a brief look at the outcome of the trial, which incidentally falls outside the direct time span of the present study. The final outcome has been included in order to appreciate the full significance of the Meerut Conspiracy Case in a broader perspective.

Finally the fifth chapter attempts to evaluate the entire Meerut Conspiracy issue, first by looking at the possible motives of the British Government in launching the case, and then by examining the direct and indirect consequences of the trial to determine the justifiability of the whole case. The concluding remarks contain an assessment of the events under consideration.

Pertinent official and unofficial documents, newspapers and

reviews have been used to a great extent in the present study. Personal interviews and discussions conducted with several Indians who were involved in various capacities with the political movements of the period, and my familiarity with the languages and customs of the country have no doubt been helpful in preparation of the present work. I hope this examination of the left-wing movement in India for the period 1928-29 and the Meerut Conspiracy Case will contribute to filling a significant gap in our knowledge of left-wing politics in modern Indian history.

CHAPTER I

Left-Wing in India*Background*

ALTHOUGH Indian leftism made its first appearance after World War I, through the 19th and early 20th century, changes were already taking place in the socio-economic and political structures of India which gradually prepared the grounds for the emergence of leftism after the war. It was in the middle of the 19th century that the real foundations of modern industry in India were laid. The dismal conditions under which large numbers of women and children worked in factories roused before the turn of the century, in India just as it had in England, the interest of philanthropists and of social workers.¹ Their motive was primarily humanitarian. Protest meetings were sponsored to draw the attention of the public and the Government to the grievances of labour for better legislation. As one historian observed:

The trend of the Indian labour movement, if one could call it by that name, from 1875 to 1918, was characterized by a tendency to petition, memorialize and seek redress of grievances by mild pressure.²

Out of these agitations arose the first few organizations for labour during the eighties and nineties of the last century in Bombay and at other places. These were not trade unions in the proper sense of the term, but they did pioneering work in alleviating some of the outstanding grievances of labour.³

The political theorizing of this period was largely dominated by the political problem of self-government. The leading thinkers of the time were mostly political moderates. Profoundly influenced by the liberalism of

the time, they placed little importance on organizing the poorer class, and stood for reform movements in religious, social and political fields through constitutional means and the spreading of education. This, in a way, prevented the emergence of leftism at an earlier period as it was strongly believed that by ending political subjection, economic and social problems would be solved more easily.

The end of World War I saw a radical transformation of the scene. While the number of industries had increased during the war period, the condition of the workers had worsened with rising prices and low wages. The ferment of war had also brought about a revolutionary change in the outlook of the Indian industrial workers as a class.⁴ Moreover, the end of the war synchronized with the outbreak of an epidemic of influenza in India affecting millions and resulting in a shortage of labour. The alterations found expression, as the Royal Commission on Labour in India describes it, in "the realization of the potentialities of the strike."⁵ A great strike wave hit the country affecting practically the whole of the industrial system.⁶ It was this period of militancy in the industrial labour world of India which gave rise to the first trade unions, leading ultimately to the formation of the All India Trade Union Congress in 1920.⁷

Some of the other important factors which started operating upon the scene in the post-war era were: the ideals of the British labour movement; the far-reaching implications of the Russian Revolution; and the fresh wave of political movement under the dynamic leadership of Gandhi involving new methods of struggle. In the trade union field the influence of the British Labour Party was most apparent. During the period 1923-27 the theory and practice of the British labour movement that had started to penetrate into India after World War I was still on the agenda but after repeated attempts, projects for an Indian Labour Party, shaped in the likeness of its British counterpart, failed to materialize.⁸

The success of the Bolshevik Revolution stirred the imagination of most of the nationalist leaders in India as a symbol of struggle against colonial imperialism. However, the socio-economic connotations of Marxism was not fully fathomed by the Indian thinkers though the concept of a proletarian revolution

made powerful appeal to a few individuals.⁹ A group of young educated Indians from India along with other Indian exiles from Europe and Asia, were indoctrinated in Communist strategy and tactics in the U.S.S.R. and were later sent back to organize workers in India. This group acting under the initiative of the Third Communist International established the first squads of an emigre Communist Party of India in 1920-21, at first in Tashkent and Moscow, and subsequently in India.¹⁰ These young Communist organizations were founded on the basis of the Colonial Thesis of the Second Congress of the Communist International (1920). There had been differences between Lenin and M. N. Roy, the noted Indian Communist, with respect to the exact line to be adopted in the colonies. The Congress adopted the resolution that in dealing with national movements in the colonies, the Communists should make a distinction between "bourgeois-democratic movements" and "national-revolutionary movements," and should support the latter. The Communists were also asked to establish independent nuclei of Communist activities and party organization in the colonial countries.¹¹

The development in the nationalist struggle for independence during this period under the guidance of Gandhi was significant in the growth of leftism in India. The Gandhian movement involving the new technique of mass contact and direct action discredited the old politics of both the Moderates and the Extremists and carried political and public affairs to the level of villages, and to the masses. Some of the young Indian nationalist leaders thus drawn to the "grass roots" were soon dissatisfied with Gandhian methods of dealing with India's political and economic problems and turned more and more towards Marxism and socialism.

The period 1922-26 marked a turning point in the nascent Communist activity in India. After the suspension of the Gandhian movement in 1922 there was a readjustment in Communist strategy and their activity started along two parallel though connected lines of work. Firstly, among the trade unions it started on the basis of class struggle in opposition to the current official line of policy followed by non-Communist trade union leaders, and, secondly, in the political field attempts were made to explore an appropriate political organ through which revolu-

tionary activity could be carried on. Considerable success was achieved in the trade union movement. In the political field, however, the leftists were less successful and between 1925-1928 several attempts were made to form a Peoples' Party and other front organizations but none made much headway. Side by side, attempts were also being made to create a real, well-organized Communist Party in India. But the handful of Communists had been so pre-occupied with the development of front rank organizations that this latter task was largely neglected.

Meanwhile, a third force, moving in a socialistic direction, began to take shape as a left-wing inside the Indian National Congress itself, largely under the youthful leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru of the U.P., Subhas Chandra Bose of Bengal, S. Srinivasa Iyengar of Madras and others. It was very much an amorphous group rather than a well-organized and coherent left-wing and it consisted of nationalists whose primary allegiance was to the Indian National Congress. They felt that the goal of national freedom, as defined by the Congress, was vague and unrealizable, unless the Congress was brought in touch with the masses (peasants and workers).¹² This section became more and more aggressive by 1928 and believed that mere political freedom without social and economic reconstruction was impractical. They looked to the Soviet Union and Marxism for answers to Indian problems. However, they remained distinctly different from the Indian Communists in that their admiration of Marxist and socialist ideas were more superficial and without any commitment to a worldwide revolution of the proletariat; they were nationalists first, owing allegiance to the Indian National Congress and to the goal of national independence.

The period of the late 1920's also saw the emergence of various peasant, youth and student organizations with socialistic leanings. All these indicated the general diffusion of socialism and constituted a broad spectrum of left-wing activities in India during the period of January, 1928 to March, 1929.

Left-Wing and the Trade Unions

The post World War I period saw the emergence of real trade unions and of a modern labour movement in India. To

begin with, most of these organizations were essentially strike committees, springing up in the conditions of an immediate struggle but lacking in staying power. Many, however, succeeded in establishing themselves as trade unions and strengthened their positions later on.¹² In July, 1920, the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) was organized to co-ordinate the trade union activities of the country. It held its first session in Bombay in October, 1920, under the presidentship of Lala Lajpat Rai.¹⁴ The immediate cause for the foundation of the AITUC was India's membership in the newly-formed International Labour Organization. During its first few years of existence, the AITUC was a loosely structured organization whose chief function was to represent India at various international labour conferences. Its secretary as well as one of its founders was Chaman Lal, a member of the Workers' Welfare League of India in London. This organization, established in 1917, became a Communist vehicle for influencing trade union activities in India and in August, 1924, the League was appointed as the AITUC's representative in England.¹⁵ From time to time the Workers' Welfare League sent trained trade union organizers to India and was treated with suspicion by the British intelligence who regarded it as "the first foreign agency to introduce Bolshevik principles into the trade union movement in India."¹⁶ Communist influence in Indian trade unions, however, was insignificant during these early years. Until 1927 the AITUC leadership was dominated by nationalist and moderate trade unionists.

Leftist and Communist activities in the trade unions continued to increase steadily from 1925, following the Cawnpore Conspiracy Case (1924).¹⁷ An important leftist and a Communist sympathizer, D. R. Thengdi of Nagpur, became the president of the AITUC which held its session in February, 1925 in Bombay. In this presidential address he advocated nationwide strikes. He was the first to advance the concept of class struggle from the trade union platform in India.¹⁸ The first of May was for the first time celebrated at Lahore in 1927 when the slogan "long live the Red Flag" replaced "*Bande Mataram*" (Hail to Mother India) in the labour rallies. The membership of the trade unions increased by large numbers and a new wave of strikes overtook the country. In Bombay alone, trade union

membership which in three years (1923-26) had only advanced from 44,669 to 59,544 reached 75,602 by 1927, rose to 95,321 by March, 1928, and to 197,052 by March, 1929.¹⁰ The following table will show the steady rise in the number of registered and unregistered unions and their membership for the country between 1927 and 1929 :

Table 1 : Growth of the trade unions in India, 1927-29²⁰

Year	Total No. of Unions	Membership	<i>Registered-Unions</i>	
			No.	Membership
1927	72	87,340	11	45,253
1928	94	198,072	30	152,061
1929	104	242,355	42	153,463

A number of foreign Communists and labour leaders arrived in India between 1925 and 1928 in order to reinforce the local movements. With their superior organizational abilities and enthusiasm they succeeded in imparting a new spirit to the working class movement of India. Most of these emissaries worked through a series of connected organizations, including the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), the Red International of Labour Unions, the League against Imperialism, the Workers' Welfare League of India, and the Labour Research Department, supported by a group of London trade unions.²¹ It was in association with these international organizations and the Foreign Bureau of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in Europe that they conducted their work in India.²²

As a result of a request from M. N. Roy to the CPGB for the dispatch of an agent to India to arrange for the reception and transmission of Communist propaganda, Charles Ashleigh (alias Nanda Lal) arrived in Bombay on September 19, 1922. Before reaching India, his departure had been detected and his passport cancelled. While awaiting deportation, however, he managed to contact several persons, including the prominent Indian Communist S. A. Dange.²³ The next Communist emissary to arrive in India was Percy E. Glading (alias R. O. Cochrane) in February, 1925. He was a prominent member of the British Bureau of the Red International of Labour Unions and his primary mission was to make a study of Indian labour

conditions. He, however, succeeded in achieving very little in his three month stay in India and returned to England in April.²⁴ In April, 1926, he was followed by George Allison (alias Donald Campbell), a former Scottish coal miner. He was sent by the Red International of Labour Unions to develop a left-wing inside the AITUC. In January, 1927, Allison was arrested on a charge of entering India with a forged passport. He was given an eighteen month sentence and was deported to England at the end of the term.²⁵

Philip Spratt, a graduate of Cambridge University, arrived in India on 31st December, 1926, under the guise of a bookseller. His mission was to contact Indian Communists, scattered in various urban centers, and assist them in establishing a Workers' and Peasants' Party on an all-India scale.²⁶ Such a party, it was hoped, would prove attractive to radical Congressmen and was viewed as a possible vehicle for work within both the Congress party and the Indian Labour movement.²⁷ A man of superb organizational skill, he was a very effective agent and was the cause of the greatest concern to the British authorities during the period until his arrest in March, 1929. On January 4, 1927, Shapurji Saklatvala, an Indian resident of London who was also a Communist Member of Parliament, arrived in India. At about the same time Mardy Jones came to India as a representative of the Workers' Welfare League from London. Another emissary of the CPGB, Benjamin F. Bradley joined Spratt in September, 1927. He was also considered a very efficient Communist organizer by the British Government during the course of his activities in India in 1928-29. Finally, in September, 1928, Hugh Lester Hutchinson, an English journalist but not a member of the CPGB, appeared on the Indian scene. Others sent on similar missions were J. W. Johnstone of the American Communist Party and J. Ryan of the Australian Communist Party.²⁸

Using the trade union platform, the Communists advocated revolutionary and militant trade unionism based on the theory of uncompromising class struggle. They also emphasised the need for a working class party, the inseparability of the working class struggle from the struggle for political emancipation, and alliance with the peasant masses in their struggles.

There were a number of factors which contributed to this increase in the Communist influences in the trade union activities of India. First, although a few of its leaders had taken an active interest in the AITUC, the Indian National Congress had generally ignored the Indian labour movement despite its potentiality as a political weapon. Gandhi hoped to avoid, as far as possible, the mixing of politics with trade union activity, and he renounced the use of strikes as conducive to violence and therefore in violation of his principle of *ahimsa* (non-violence).²⁹ Second, the Communists had the support of those nationalism-oriented leaders who were active within the labour movement and who shared their aim of associating the AITUC with the anti-British struggle.³⁰ Even moderate trade unionists, like N. M. Joshi, who favoured a neutral policy on political matters, initially welcomed the Communists as collaborators in the trade union field. Third, they were helped to a large extent by the deplorable conditions of industrial workers in India, especially among the textile labourers. Finally, the recently passed Trade Union Act of 1926, which went into effect on June 1, 1927, served as a stimulus to trade unionism by providing for the registration of unions that met certain specified requirements and granting such unions immunity from criminal and civil suits for actions taken in furtherance of labour objectives.³¹

The area where the Communist influence over the trade unions appears to have been the greatest was in the increase in the number of strikes. The year 1928 witnessed the greatest tide of working class unrest of any year in the post-war period. The official publication *India in 1928-29* reported for the period April 1, 1928 to March 30, 1929 :

The total number of strikes was 203, involving no less than 506,851 people, as compared with 129 strikes in 1927-28 in which 131,655 people were involved. The total number of working days lost was 31,647,404 which is greater than the total number of working days lost in the five preceding years taken together.³²

The following table gives a vivid picture of reported industrial disputes for the period 1925-1929 :

Table 2 : Labour Disputes in India, 1925-1929³³

Year	No. of Disputes	No. of workers involved	No. of working days lost
1925	134	270,432	12,578,129
1926	128	186,811	1,097,478
1927	129	131,655	2,019,970
1928	203	506,851	31,647,404
1929	141	532,016	12,165,691

The chief center of the strikes was Bombay Textile Mills where one strike lasted for a full six months, from April to October, 1928. The strike involved 150,000 workers and a loss of 22,347,620 working days.³⁴ The strike, no doubt, gave expression to the prevailing industrial unrest and discontent among the workers over wage cuts, unemployment and the proposed introduction of the "rationalization scheme".³⁵ It was in connection with this strike, over its desirability or otherwise that a controversy arose between the Communists and other officials of the Trade Union Congress like N. M. Joshi. The Bombay Textile Labour Union, controlled by non-Communists, did not take an active part in the strike. In May, 1928, the Communists started a rival trade union organization of textile workers of Bombay called Girni Kamgar Union (GKU) also known as the "Red Flag Union" among the workers.³⁶ This was the first purely left-wing trade union of India. It started with a membership of 384, but the membership soon rose to 54,000 by December, 1928 and by March, 1929, it had reached 65,000.³⁷ Thus the GKU almost overnight became the largest labour union of India. Its executive was comprised entirely of the extremist labour leaders of the Bombay Workers' and Peasants' Party. A. A. Alve was the president; S. A. Dange, the general secretary; and S. V. Ghate, the treasurer. B. F. Bradley, L. Hutchinsoa, R. S. Nimbkar, and S. H. Jhabwalla served as vice-presidents of the union.³⁸

The Royal Commission on Labour, reporting on labour conditions in India at the time, stated that the absence of a strong organization of cotton mill workers combined with the mood generated by prolonged strike, allowed the Communist leaders "by

an intense effort to capture the imagination of the workers and eventually to sweep over 50,000 of them into a Communist organization."³⁹ In Bombay, Communist influences also spread among municipal, oil installation, transport and dock workers.⁴⁰ As a result of the influx of membership in the Communist dominated unions, trade union membership in Bombay increased by 70% in the four-month period preceding December 1, 1928.

The strikes and Communist activities in the trade unions were not confined to the city of Bombay alone. As R. P. Dutt, the noted British-Indian Communist writer recorded :

Of the 203 disputes, 111 were in Bombay, 60 in Bengal, 8 in Bihar and Orissa, 7 in Madras and 2 in the Punjab ; 110 were in the cotton and wool textile industry, 9 in jute, 11 in the engineering workshops, 9 on the railways and in the railway workshops, and 1 in coal mining.⁴¹

Apparently the Communists were active among the textile workers of Sholapur and Kanpur in the U.P., the iron and steel workers of Jamshedpur in Bihar, the jute workers near Calcutta, and the railroad workers throughout northern India. During this period the Great Indian Peninsula (GIP) Railwaymen's Union was organized with Jhabwalla as a general secretary, Bradley as vice-president, and Joglekar as organizing secretary.⁴² By 1929, it claimed a membership of 41,000.⁴³ Communists were successful in organizing workers in other areas of the economy as well. British intelligence reported :

By the end of 1928 . . . there was hardly a single public utility service or industry which had not been affected, in whole or in part, by the wave of Communism which swept the country during the year. Transport, industrial, and agricultural workers of every description, clerks, policemen, colliers and even scavengers were amongst the many who were subjected to, if they did not fall under, the baneful influence of this whirlwind propaganda campaign which promised them the sweets of revolution if they would but raise their hands to grasp them.⁴⁴

In this connection, it is worthwhile to look at the findings of the Royal Commission on Labour in India, who maintained that :

... although workers may have been influenced by persons with nationalist, communist or commercial ends to serve, we believe that there has rarely been a strike of any importance which has not been due entirely or largely, to economic reasons.⁴⁵

But judging from the nature in which most of these strikes were conducted in 1928, it seems that although most of them originated as grievances of an economic character, they were used by the leftist leaders more and more to establish trade unions on the principle of Marxism and the concept of class struggle. In addition to these revolutionary ideas, there was also an attempt to instill into the workers a sense of internationalism. Thus by the end of 1928, important changes were very clearly taking place in the Indian labour movement. The rising tone of militancy in trade unionism, the strike waves with their accompanying slogans of class war, socialism and labour internationalism—were imparting a new international significance to the whole movement. The two most important post-war influences upon the labour movement of India—one from the British Labour Party and the other from International Communism which had co-existed for so long a time—now clashed with each other. Indian labour was now faced with the question of international affiliation—a choice of alliance with the British Labour Party and through it the International Federation of Trade Unions and the Socialist International (Amsterdam), or alliance with International Communism, the Red International of Labour Unions and the Third Communist International (Moscow). Spokesmen for both the groups started vigorous campaigns and in this atmosphere of growing rivalry for gaining control of the AITUC, the 9th annual session of the AITUC was held at Jharia, Bihar, on December 18-20, 1928. On the basis of their new strength in the labour unions, Communists made a determined effort to capture the leadership of the Trade Union Congress.

In all respects this was a very important session of the Trade Union Congress and it was attended by several foreign labour leaders.⁴⁶ The delegates were addressed by the American J. W. Johnstone as a representative of the League against Imperialism. He compared the exploitation of the Indians by the British with that of the Negro by American capitalists and "the

chauvinism of the white worker." He argued that there could be little improvement in the conditions of Indian labour under British domination and urged the AITUC to strengthen its cause by affiliating with the League against Imperialism.⁴⁷ Johnstone, who had been under close police surveillance since his arrival in India on November 22, was arrested immediately after the close of the open session of the Congress.

Jawaharlal Nehru also addressed this session and has vividly described the situation pertaining to the internal conflicts in the AITUC as he found in December, 1928 :

. . . I found the old tussle going on between the reformists and the more advanced and revolutionary elements. The main points in issue were the question of affiliation to one of the Internationals, as well as to the League against Imperialism and the Pan-Pacific Union, and the desirability of sending representatives to the International Labour Office Conference at Geneva. More important than these questions was the vast difference in outlook between the two sections of the Congress. There was the old trade union group, moderate in politics and indeed distrusting the intrusion of politics in industrial matters. . . . The other group was more militant, believed in political action, and openly proclaimed its revolutionary outlook. It was influenced, though by no means controlled, by some Communists and some near-Communists. . . . The radical group, though more powerful in the rank and file, had little opportunity of influencing policy at the top. . . . The trade union movement was still in its early youth in India ; it was weak and was largely being run by non-worker leaders. . . . My own sympathies at Jharia were with the advanced group.⁴⁸

The Communist candidate for the presidency of the AITUC was D. B. Kulkarni, a railroad clerk. To block his election the moderates sponsored Jawaharlal Nehru who won by a narrow margin.⁴⁹ Kulkarni and the Bengali Communist leader Muzaffar Ahmad, along with three others, subsequently became vice-presidents of the AITUC. Thengdi, Bradley and Spratt were elected

to the ten-man executive committee and Dange was chosen as one of two assistant secretaries.

The resolutions adopted at Jharia reflected the increased strength of the left-wing within the labour movement. The delegates voted in favour of condemning the arrest of Johnstone, reaffirming their opposition to imperialism as "a form of Capitalist Class Government," promoting international class solidarity, and castigating the British Labour Party for betraying the Indian working class. The Congress decided to affiliate with the League against Imperialism for one year and also elected D. R. Thengdi and K. N. Joglekar as fraternal delegates to the forthcoming world conference of the League.⁵⁰ The AITUC, in a resolution on "Labour and Future Constitution of India" urged the All Parties Conference to draft the future constitution of India incorporating the following within its scope :

- (i) Socialistic Republican Government of the working class ;
- (ii) Abolition of Indian States ;
- (iii) Nationalization of industries and land ;
- (iv) Universal adult franchise ; etc.⁵¹

This Congress registered the victory of the Communists and other left-wing elements on some major issues and really marked the high tide of Communism in the trade union field. It was also indicative of the fact that the right leadership was gradually losing ground and the inevitable split occurred at the next annual session of the AITUC at Nagpur.

Although a number of Communist leaders made significant contributions to this success of left-wing activities in Indian trade union movement during 1928-1929, the two people who were largely responsible for bringing this about were Philip Spratt and Muzaffar Ahmad. A British intelligence report on the political events of the period paid the following tribute to Spratt's and Muzaffar Ahmad's industry and leadership qualities:

To him [Spratt] and Muzaffar Ahmed is due in very great measure the striking success which attended the party's efforts during 1928 and the spring of 1929. . . . Spratt in particular was ubiquitous. He worked in 1927 mainly with the Bombay group, in 1928 with the Bengal party. He played a large part in uniting the

Punjab groups into one party and in the formation of those in the United Provinces into another. And all the time he was carrying on correspondence with the conspirators on the Continent and in England, informing them of the progress of the work, discussing difficulties, receiving instructions. . . . Second only to him was Muzaffar Ahmed, who, however autocratic he may have been, managed by voluminous correspondence to keep in touch not only with the workers abroad but also with all the other workers in India and saw to it that none was idle.⁵²

Workers' and Peasants' Parties

While the main activity of the Communists was directed towards working within the trade unions, there started coming into being certain other political organizations for mass action in the form of Workers' and Peasants' parties. As early as 1922, M. N. Roy advocated the formation of a broad-based legal party in India with an illegal Communist nucleus. He wrote to Muzaffar Ahmad in Calcutta and S. A. Dange in Bombay suggesting that Indian Communists should form a secret Communist Party. At the same time, they were to develop an open party which would be called either the "Peoples' Party" or the "Workers' and Peasants' Party." This group, which would incorporate "all the revolutionists and nationalists," was to stress a nationalist, anti-imperialist platform.⁵³

Originally called the Labour Swaraj Party of the Indian National Congress, the first Workers' and Peasants' party was formed in Bengal in 1926. Others followed in Bombay, the Punjab and the United Provinces. These were united in 1928 in the All India Workers' and Peasants' Party (WPP) which held its first Congress in December, 1928, in Calcutta under the presidentship of Sohan Singh Josh. Until this Congress was held, but for occasional contacts and consultations, the Workers' and Peasants' parties functioned in a loose, decentralized manner as practically independent provincial organizations. Of the four such parties which existed only the Workers' and Peasants' parties of Bombay and Bengal were politically most active. Though by

no means a purely Communist organization, Communists were the main spirit of the various Workers' and Peasants' parties as they emerged. Their establishment was assisted and made possible also through the existence of an alliance with the left groups inside the Indian National Congress with the Communists and with trade unions. The main driving force in the formation of the Workers' and Peasants' parties, first on a provincial basis and later on a national level, was Philip Spratt, the British Communist, who had arrived in India in December, 1926. Spratt himself stated that his principal mission in India was to see that . . . the Communist Party of India should launch a Workers' and Peasants' Party as a legal cover, and that members should get into the trade unions and obtain the leadership of them.⁵⁴

The Labour Swaraj Party of the Indian National Congress was organized in Bengal in November, 1925, by persons who had no contact with M. N. Roy or the Communist International.⁵⁵ In January, 1926, Muzaffar Ahmad joined the party followed by Dharani Goswami, Gopen Chakravarty, along with five other former members of the secret terrorist society of Bengal, *Amushilan*. The activities of the party was propagandist and agitational in nature and the party also published its organ *Lungal* (Plough) which was later called *Ganavani* (The Voice of the Masses).⁵⁶ The most significant meeting of the party was its third annual conference which was held at Bhatpara, in March, 1928. The resolutions adopted at this conference laid the political and constitutional working guidelines of the other Workers' and Peasants' parties as well as of the All India Workers' and Peasants' Party. These resolutions and the report of the conference along with some essays of Philip Spratt were edited in a book entitled "A Call to Action" which was published by the Workers' and Peasants' party of Bengal in 1928.⁵⁷

As in Bengal, the Workers' and Peasants' party in Bombay also started as a "Congress Labour Group" in 1925, then became the Congress Labour Party, and finally changed into the Workers' and Peasants' party in the beginning of January, 1927. S. S. Mirajkar was chosen as the party secretary and S. V. Ghate, K. N. Joglekar and R. S. Nimbkar were elected to the executive committee.⁵⁸ Both S. A. Dange, after his release from prison

in May, and B. F. Bradley, upon his arrival in September, became important members of the executive committee of the party. Most of the ordinary members of the Workers' and Peasants' party of Bombay were Congressmen and some held important posts in the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee.⁵⁰ In May, 1927, the party began publication of a Marathi language paper called *Kranti* (Revolution). Suspended at the end of the year for financial reasons, the paper was revived during the 1928 general strike of cotton mills in Bombay. The main activity of the Workers' and Peasants' party of Bombay was confined to industrial workers and work among peasants was virtually neglected. Apart from mobilizing the textile labour force of Bombay in launching the large number of strikes in 1928, they were also very successful in organizing the municipal and dock workers of the region. Philip Spratt was the man chiefly responsible for organizing the structure and activities of the party.

Throughout 1927 Spratt travelled extensively in northern India in an attempt to organize various other Workers' and Peasants' parties. As a result of his continued efforts the *Punjab Kirti Kisan* (Workers' and Peasants') party was formed in April, 1928 under the secretaryship of Sohan Singh Josh. The party's chief organ was a Punjabi monthly, *Kirti* (Worker).⁶⁰ Though the party followed its Bombay and Bengal counterparts generally, yet it was chiefly concerned with the problems of peasants rather than those of the industrial workers.

Thereafter, in October, 1928, the inaugural conference of the U. P. Workers' and Peasants' party was held at Meerut with Puran Chand Joshi as the general secretary of the party. The party's chief publication, *Krantikar* (The Revolutionary) made its first appearance on November 17, 1928.⁶¹

Before the end of 1928 there were four Workers' and Peasants' parties in India—in Bombay, Bengal, the Punjab and the U. P.—and plans were being laid for the formation of an all-India WPP. The WPP as it thus developed was in reality a projection of the CPI or as Spratt described it was "the only 'front' organization in India" at the time.⁶² Though the Communist Party was not yet declared illegal, the various conspiracy cases and other Government measures had shown that it was difficult to function openly in the name of the Party, and the

Communists operated from the platform of the WPP. All literature, appeals, manifestos, and programmes of the Party were prepared by them. Muzaffar Ahmad, the leading Indian Communist and an active participant in the events of the time maintains :

What we used to decide in the Communist Party was actually put into practice from the platform of the Workers' and Peasants' Party. The leaflets of this party were all drafted by the Communist Party.⁶³

Thus the Communists worked as a governing caucus within WPP. In a letter written to Muzaffar Ahmad in December, 1927, M. N. Roy discussed the relationship of the WPP to the CPI.⁶⁴ Roy favoured the continued existence of both parties : the CPI should be illegal, and the WPP legal. "A Communist Party," he said, "can exist legally in India only if it abstains from the preparations to wage war against the King, that is, legality can be had at the expense of the very *raison d'être* of the CP." The WPP, on the other hand, would be a legal party with a broader organizational base.

It should be rallying ground of all exploited social elements (proletariat, peasantry and petty bourgeoisie) which must unite themselves in a revolutionary struggle against foreign imperialism and native reaction, the elements that must participate in the struggle for the creation of such political and economic conditions as will help the proletariat in its further struggle against Capitalism. The communists should be in WPP and by virtue of their being the conscious vanguard of the working class, will be the driving force of the Party. But the WPP is distinct from CP in that its programme is not a communist programme. Its programme is the programme of the democratic revolution which includes the realization of the minimum political and economic demands of the workers and peasants. The CP supports this programme as its minimum programme.⁶⁵

The inaugural conference of the All-India Workers' and Peasants' Party was held in Calcutta, December 21-24, 1928, and was attended by representatives of the Workers' and Peasants' parties of Bombay, Bengal, the Punjab and the U.P. Almost all the

important Communists and left-wing trade unionists of the country along with J. F. Ryan, Philip Spratt and B. F. Bradley participated in the conference.⁶⁶ In the thesis adopted at this conference, the WPP's Communist leaders indicated that all efforts were now to be directed toward strengthening this "open," legal, mass organization. The thesis ignored the CPI, but declared that the WPP was "the only organization which has a correct policy and can unite and lead all the mass revolutionary forces of the country."⁶⁷ It emphatically declared that the basis of the Party was materialistic analysis of society and the theory of class struggle. With obvious reference to Gandhism, the Party declared its complete faith in industrialism and resolved on a revolutionary method to achieve complete independence, which was regarded as the first task of the Party. The Nehru Report accepting as the nationalist goal dominion status instead of independence was sharply criticized by the Party. Formerly, the thesis declared, it had been appropriate that the WPP work within the national movement as a left-wing of the Congress Party. Now, however, the situation has changed, and the WPP must prepare to play a definitely independent part. Relations with the National Congress Party was spelled out in detail :

For some time . . . the Congress will maintain its composite character, as a loose organization, with indefinite creed, under bourgeois leadership, but with a petty-bourgeois following including different social strata and different political tendencies, some of a potentially revolutionary nature. While this is the case, and while the Workers' and Peasants' Party remains relatively weak and unorganized in the country, it will be necessary to follow the traditional policy of forming factions within Congress organizations for the purpose of agitation, of exposing its reactionary leadership and of drawing the revolutionary sections towards the Workers' and Peasants' Party. This policy, however, is only temporary. The Workers' and Peasants' Party can have no intention of dominating or capturing the Congress ; the function of its members within the Congress is a purely critical one. Party members cannot, therefore, be allowed to take office in [the] Congress organi-

zation (except with the special permission of the N.E.C.). 'The objects of the Workers' and Peasants' Party can only be to build up its own independent organization so that it can as soon as possible dispense with the necessity of agitation within the Congress.⁶⁸

Another important matter decided in the conference was the relation of the WPP with the radical left faction inside the Indian National Congress, and with the Independence for India League which that faction had organized in November, 1928. In this regard the thesis said :

Although not homogeneous in membership, the Independence League has a definite policy and program. It is in essence a bourgeois organization whose policy is an insincere travesty of that of the Workers' and Peasants' Party, and whose object is in large part to prevent the independent growth of the mass movement. Workers' and Peasants' Party members cannot enter the Independence League as members, as to do so would be to attribute to it before the masses a seriousness and importance which it does not possess. The Workers' and Peasants' Party can only work with the Independence League in a united front, on the basis of its propaganda for independence, which in spite of its frivolous character has objectively some value. But it is necessary continually to expose the League's faults of program and policy, and its fundamentally bourgeois, even Fascist character, and ultimately counter-revolutionary role.⁶⁹

The leaders of the international Communist movement tolerated and even encouraged the WPP but at the same time it made clear that it had never considered the party to be a substitute for the separate existence of the Communist Party or that the latter should in any way be neglected. Thus the Colonial thesis of the Sixth Comintern Congress said :

Special "Workers' and Peasants' Parties," whatever revolutionary character they may possess, can too easily, at particular periods, be converted into ordinary petty-bourgeois parties, and accordingly, Communists are not recommended to organize such parties. The

Communist Party can never build its organization on the basis of a fusion of two classes, and in the same way also it can not make its task to organize other parties on this basis, which is characteristic of petty bourgeois groups. . . . The union of all Communist groups and individual Communists scattered throughout the country into a single, illegal, independent and centralized party represents the first task of the Indian Communists.⁷⁰

Thus the Communist International was sharply critical of the WPP when the first all-India conference of the Party was being held in Calcutta. On the third day of the Calcutta conference, the Indian Communists received a letter from the Executive Committee of the Communist International addressed to the WPP, specifically prohibiting any alliance with the Independence for India League and saying that the WPP had nothing to do with the Communist International.⁷¹ Despite this plain injunction to steer clear of the Independence League, the WPP's resolution dealing with the matter, though critical, was not totally in line with the Comintern instruction. Moreover, as the Comintern message reached the CPI very late, no action was taken with regard to the dissolution of the WPP as expressly desired by the sixth Congress of the Communist International. Also, the CPGB which, through Spratt and Bradley was directing the CPI, had maintained its opposition to the new line on the WPP's. Indeed, in late November, 1928, almost two months after the Sixth Congress, Clemens Dutt wrote to P. C. Joshi: "I hope that you are finding it possible to draw in actual proletarian workers into the WP Party."⁷² So in spite of the strong Comintern criticism, the WPP continued to exist until its leaders were arrested in March, 1929.

Indian Communists' Political Line and the Comintern

Although the Communist activity in the trade union field followed a clear and well-established pattern, in the political field it was more ambiguous and confused. Not until after the Kanpur Bolshevik Conspiracy Case did the first legal Communist Party come into being in India.⁷³ At the end of 1924, a resident

of Kanpur who took the name of Satya Bhakta (devotee of truth) published what came to be known as "the first quarterly report of the Indian Communist Party." In this document he claimed that the Party had been formed on September 1, 1924, and had a total of seventy-eight members.⁷⁴ In December, 1925, a Communist conference was held in Kanpur where Satya Bhakta and his supporters lost in a power struggle with Muzaffar Ahmad, Ghate and other Communists who had been long in contact with Roy and the Comintern, over the question of the Party's relationship to the international Communist movement.⁷⁵ So the Communist Party of India was organized for the first time within India in December, 1925, with J. P. Bergerhotta and S. V. Ghate as its joint secretaries. The executive committee, in addition to the joint secretaries, included K. N. Joglekar and R. S. Nimbkar from Bombay, Muzaffar Ahmad from Calcutta, Abdul Majid from Lahore, and others.⁷⁶

Many sessions of the newly formed Central Committee of the Party were held between 1926 and March, 1929. Sometimes it met four times a year. The Committee itself was reorganized in 1927, 1928, and 1929. This undoubtedly provided the much needed centralized, coordinated leadership, but lack of complete unanimity on questions, ideological and organizational, tactical and strategic, besides shortage of funds and deficiency of membership continued to be a handicap to the proper functioning of the Party. Moreover, the multiplicity of advice from abroad, which was often contradictory as well, added substantially to the disruption of the progress of the CPI. An international review of the work of the Party between 1924-1928 maintained that the Party had not been able to develop into a genuine Communist Party, and that the problem of the organization of a Communist Party as the vanguard of the proletariat, which must lead the national revolution, was still to be solved.⁷⁷ This slow growth of the Party is also corroborated by Philip Spratt who stated that when he arrived in India there were fifteen or twenty nominal members, most of whom did not know what a Communist Party was, and did not try to organize it or carry on its work.⁷⁸

An important meeting of the Central Committee of the Party was held in September-October, 1928, at Bombay, in which significant decisions for revolutionary mass action were taken.

The meeting was attended by the leading members of Bombay and Bengal parties. The book *A Call to Action* was issued at this meeting. Later, in the Meerut Conspiracy Case, the meeting was referred to as "War Council" by the Sessions Judge at Meerut for its advocacy of revolutionary action.

In the international field the most important factor to have influenced the growth of the Communist movement in India was, of course, the decisions and directives of the Communist International. The application of the new thesis, adopted by the Comintern at its Sixth World Congress did considerable damage to the Communist activity in India by giving rise to "left sectarianism" amongst Indian Communists.⁷⁹

In the discussions of the Sixth Congress held in Moscow from July 17 to September 1, 1928, consideration of colonial revolution "from the point of view of struggle against imperialism" occupied a central position. After a long debate on the colonial question between the conflicting viewpoints of the Russians and the British Communists, the New Colonial Thesis which ultimately emerged from the Sixth Congress was mainly faithful to the Russian view. Although debate on the new line continued for some time after the conclusion of the Sixth Congress, this Congress did mark the beginning of a new strategy for India. From its long-held policy of supporting bourgeois nationalism the Comintern moved toward one of opposing it.

The basic tasks of the Indian Communists consist in a struggle against British Imperialism for the emancipation of the country, for the destruction of all relics of feudalism, for the agrarian revolution and for establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry in the form of a Soviet Republic. The union of all Communist groups and individual Communists scattered throughout the country into a single, illegal, independent and centralized party represents the first task of the Indian Communists. . . . The Communists must unmask the national reformism of the Indian National Congress and oppose all the phases of the Swarajists, Gandhites, etc. about passive resistance. . . . It must be remembered that under no circumstances can the communists relinquish their right to open

criticism of the leadership of those mass organizations in which they work.⁸⁰

In order to carry out this program there must be a "union of all Communist groups and individual Communists scattered throughout the country into a single, illegal, independent and centralized party" and so the effectuation of this union represented the first task of the Indian Communists.⁸¹

As for the Communist-controlled Workers' and Peasants' parties and the proposed All-India WPP the thesis warned the Indian comrades that "Communists are not recommended to organize such parties" because they "can too easily . . . be converted into ordinary petty bourgeois parties;" hence the Indian "Communist Party can never build its organization on the basis of a fusion of two classes," the workers and the peasants.⁸² The Comintern, therefore, wanted to liquidate the WPP while M. N. Roy and the CPGB did not. Both Roy and CPGB favoured two parties, a legal WPP dominated by an illegal CPI. The CPGB position was clearly inunciated by R. P. Dutt who commenting on the new unfriendly line of the Comintern toward the WPP, said :

The question of the Workers' and Peasants' Parties cannot be dismissed with a phrase of this sort . . . [their uselessness]. The characteristic feature of the Workers' and Peasants' Parties in the present stage of development in India is that they are forming an important route through which the Communists are finding their way to the masses.⁸³

There is little doubt that under the conditions then existing, both legal and political, the line propounded by Roy and the CPGB would have been the more effective approach. But regardless of what would have been best for the Communist movement in India the Russian view prevailed, and the Comintern support was withdrawn from the WPP.

However, in apparent defiance of the will of the Kremlin, the Indian Communists and their British mentors continued to work with the WPP and, as noted above, the already scheduled First Conference of the WPP was duly held in Calcutta in December, 1928. At this conference, the WPP decided to adopt a moderate policy vis-a-vis the Indian National Congress. Not only

was this contrary to the stand of the Sixth Congress, but the convening of an All-India WPP Conference was in itself directly contrary to the edict that Workers' and Peasants' parties should be liquidated. One of the reasons for this wide discrepancy could have been the delayed and faulty communication from the Comintern. Philip Spratt recalls that the Indian Communists had "no direct instructions till G. M. Adhikari arrived from Europe in December, 1928,"⁸⁴ more than three months after the conclusion of the Sixth Congress. Another possible explanation could be that the CPGB, which through Spratt and Bradley was directing the activities of the CPI at the time, had maintained its opposition to the Comintern's new line on CPI's relation with the WPP.⁸⁵ In a pamphlet published in 1929, the head of the British Labour Party, R. Page Arnot, implied defiance of Comintern policy on the WPP.⁸⁶

But while the first All-India WPP conference was being held in Calcutta in December, 1928, in a secret meeting there the CPI was again reorganized and a new Central Executive was constituted. Acting upon the directives of the Communist International, the Indian Communist leaders decided that the Communist Party which had previously not functioned as such and was only at most a small secret society, must "come out into the open," since a "revolutionary situation was there." The members also agreed that their party should apply for formal affiliation to the Communist International as one of its sections. It was agreed that every effort should be made to overthrow the rule of the Anglo-Indian government and to destroy the economic power of the Indian bourgeoisie.⁸⁷

Thus the year 1929 seemed a critical one to the Indian Communists. While the Jharia session of the AITUC demonstrated their strength inside the trade unions, the first annual conference of the WPP at Calcutta revealed their growing political significance. During the early months of 1929 the Communists planned to consolidate their position in both these spheres. In the political field, discussions went on for the reorientation of their policies, strategies and tactics in the light of the deliberations and resolutions of the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International. In the field of trade unions, the policy of relentless class struggle was being pursued all the more vigorously.

Apart from the growing economic disadvantages for the workers which continued to provide incentives for strikes, the protests and demonstrations against the Simon Commission and the Trades Disputes Bill continued. A further occasion for protest meetings and demonstrations that took place from January to March, 1929, was provided by the appointment of the Whitley Commission (or the Royal Commission on Labour) to enquire into labour conditions in India. The Communists raised loud revolutionary slogans against the Commission. Early in March, 1929, under the leadership of the Girni Kamgar Union, the textile workers of Bombay decided to resume the general strike once again. The situation thus seemed to them full of revolutionary potentialities.

With this background the CPI met again in Bombay on March 17-19, 1929, to consider the relationship of the CPI with the WPP and the question as to how to proceed with the organization of the CPI in the light of the Sixth Congress Thesis. This meeting was attended by Dr. Gangadhar Moreswar Adhikari, who had recently returned to India from Berlin.⁸⁸ He presented concrete proposals for the reorganization of the Party in order to meet the criticisms of the Comintern concerning its method of operation. According to his plan, the CPI was to be organized into five departments, dealing with trade unions, the peasantry, propaganda, organizational developments, and political control—details for the formation of which were to be formulated by a sub-committee.⁸⁹ His proposals were accepted in theory and apparently no definite decision was taken at this time on the future of the WPP. Meanwhile, it was decided that the Party would continue relations with the WPP.⁹⁰ So the Bombay meeting of the CPI ended inconclusively and definite decisions regarding Comintern directives were postponed until the next meeting of the CPI. But before the next meeting could be held, the majority of its members were arrested in connection with the Meerut Conspiracy Case.⁹¹

Communism and the Nationalist Movement

The period between 1922 and 1927 was a difficult one for the Indian nationalist movement, characterized by the suspension of the non-coöperation movement and Gandhi's withdrawal from

active politics, serious dissension within the Indian National Congress, and communal disturbances on a wide scale. The suspension of the non-cooperation movement following the Chauri Chaura incident (February, 1922) created a deep schism within the Congress party resulting in the formation of the Swaraj Party under the leadership of C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru in 1923. The new Party, formally incorporated within the Indian National Congress, soon became very powerful and as Jawaharlal Nehru maintained: "Das and Nehru [Motilal] had driven Gandhi into the background; they seemed to dominate the political scene."⁹² Moreover, the Hindu-Muslim alliance, which was brought about earlier by Gandhi's unqualified support of the Khilafat movement broke down and by 1923 communalism had become a serious problem in the Indian nationalist scene.

By late 1927 and during 1928, Indian nationalism was beginning to stir once again in response to the growing unrest and political awareness among the Indian people, and to the radical ideas for social and economic change advanced by its rising young leaders. A sizeable sector within the Congress party, sympathetic toward the idea of radical socio-economic reforms and eager to step up the struggle for complete independence was clearly discernible by 1927. The most important figure and the chief spokesman of this sector was, undoubtedly, Jawaharlal Nehru. His sympathies were clearly with the left. In February of that year Nehru had travelled to Brussels to attend the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities as the Indian National Congress party's sole delegate and was elected to its executive committee.⁹³ Out of this Conference a new Communist-inspired international organization was founded in Europe known as the "League against Imperialism and for National Independence."⁹⁴ Although not well-versed in Marxist literature, it was at this juncture in his political career that Nehru began to apply socialistic notions to his political thinking.⁹⁵ It was he who drafted the Congress's resolution on India expressing the hope that "the Indian nationalist movement" would "base its programme on the full emancipation of the peasants and workers of India, without which there can be no real freedom."⁹⁶

Nehru's initial exposure to Marxist-Leninist ideology at Brussels was further widened when he paid a brief visit to Moscow

early in November, 1927, during the tenth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. "Soviet Russia, despite certain unpleasant aspects," attracted him "greatly, and seemed to hold forth a message of hope to the world."⁹⁷

Shortly after returning from his European trip, Nehru attended the annual Congress party session at Madras in December, 1927, where he sponsored a number of fairly radical resolutions. The most important of these resolutions was the one which, for the first time, stated unequivocally that the party's goal was the attainment of complete independence, not dominion status. His other proposals included a call for association with the League against Imperialism and a resolution on "War Danger" which was inspired by the Comintern's then current denunciation of Great Britain for allegedly harbouring aggressive designs against the Soviet Union.⁹⁸ Much to Nehru's own surprise these resolutions "were all almost unanimously" adopted, though he "had an uncomfortable feeling that the resolutions were either not understood for what they were, or were distorted to mean something else. That this was so became apparent soon after the Congress, when a controversy arose on the meaning of the Independence resolution."⁹⁹

In an article in *International Press Correspondence*, Roy interpreted the sponsorship of such a resolution as a favourable sign, but characterized its passage as "a mere stage show. . . . Not a word," he noted, was said about "how the goal was to be attained." The resolution, he argued, was a concession to the "petty bourgeois elements" within the Congress party to deflect "their deviation towards revolutionary alliance with the masses."¹⁰⁰

In alliance with the new emerging left-wing inside the National Congress under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, Srinivasa Iyengar, Satya Murti and Subhas Chandra Bose, the Indian Communists made the first organized attempt at the Madras session of the Congress to influence its decisions. Prominent Communist leaders like Dange, Muzaffar Ahmad, Ghate, Joglekar, Nimbkar, Spratt and others attended the Congress and worked in a concerted manner. The Workers' and Peasants' party of Bengal addressed a Manifesto to the Congress, signed by Muzaffar Ahmad. The widely circulated Manifesto demanded

boycott of the Simon Commission on principle, a National Constituent Assembly, universal adult suffrage, complete independence, mass action in the form of general strikes and non-payment of taxes, bread for toilers, and education for all.¹⁰¹ The Communists supported Nehru's resolution on the "War Danger" and his proposal that the Congress affiliate with the League against Imperialism. But due to the pre-eminent role which Nehru played in the session, the Communists made very little impact on it. Their own resolution congratulating the Soviet Union on the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution was rejected, and the Congress refused to endorse their call for protest strikes and *hartals* against the projected visit of the Simon Commission.

Gandhi did not participate in the deliberations of the Madras Congress, but he later strongly criticized the independence resolution, charging that

The Congress stultifies itself by repenting year after year resolutions of this character when it knows that it is not capable of carrying them into effect. By passing such resolutions we make an exhibition of our impotence. . . . We have almost sunk to the level of a schoolboy's debating society.¹⁰²

The opposition of Gandhi and the conservative section of the Congress was soon to render the resolution meaningless.

The radicalization of Indian politics continued at a fast pace during 1928. In February, 1928, the Indian Statutory Commission, or better known as the Simon Commission after its Chairman John Simon, arrived in India to evaluate Indian conditions and report to the British Parliament on future constitutional reforms. The fact that no Indian was appointed to the Commission aroused widespread indignation and a movement for the boycott of the Commission gained support among all sections of the population. On arrival, the Commission was greeted with violent demonstrations and a nationwide boycott by almost all political parties. The presence of the Commission in India throughout the year served to heighten nationalist, anti-British sentiments and helped crystallize much of the growing political consciousness of the masses. During this period M. N. Roy, from Berlin, contacted all the parties participating in the boycott and urged them to issue a joint declaration that the Indian people had the exclusive

right to frame their future constitution through their representatives in a constituent assembly.¹⁰³

Provoked by the controversy surrounding the appointment of the Simon Commission, the Secretary of State for India, Lord Birkenhead, had challenged Indian leaders to come up with a proposal for constitutional reform upon which they all could agree. The All-Parties Conference of February, 1928, was convened in response to this challenge. This body appointed a sub-committee under the chairmanship of Motilal Nehru to draft a constitution. The committee's draft, known as the Nehru Report, favoured dominion status rather than complete independence and also included provisions regarding minority rights and representation of different communities. When the All-Parties Conference, convened in August to consider the Nehru Report, approved a resolution endorsing dominion status as their common objective, Jawaharlal Nehru led a group of some thirty delegates protesting that particular measure. He announced that this group would support the All-Parties Report in the interest of national unity, but at the same time he proposed to carry on such activity as proper and necessary to achieve complete independence.¹⁰⁴

This immediately precipitated a split in the nationalist ranks. S. Srinivasa Iyengar, another young dissident within the Congress party and recently returned from a tour of the Soviet Union, issued a statement saying that it would be "suicidal for India to accept Dominion Status."¹⁰⁵ He then joined with Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose in proposing to establish the Independence for India League. In a draft constitution promulgated at its first meeting in Delhi on November 3, 1928, the League defined its objective as "the achievement of complete independence for India and reconstruction of Indian society on a basis of social and economic equality."¹⁰⁶ Srinivasa Iyengar became the president of the League with Subhas Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru as joint secretaries. Speaking of the new party, Jawaharlal Nehru said: "It is a permanent organization with a definite policy and programme. It will cooperate with pleasure with all other organizations which have the same objects in common with it."¹⁰⁷

The League's program was divided into three parts, entitled "political democracy", "economic democracy", and "social demo-

cracy." On domestic issues, the program urged Congress members to adopt a policy in favour of the introduction of a socialist state. It called for such measures as the removal of social and economic disparities, nationalization of key industries and transport services, introduction of a uniform system of land tenure, etc.¹⁰⁸ At the time it was announced, this was the most radical proposal to have been put forward by a nationalist group in India.

The League's ideological orientation was somewhat compatible with that of Communism. It is true that its leaders were radical and militant, and viewed the Soviet Union with sympathy and accepted many socialistic theories. However, as Overstreet and Windmiller pointed out, "they were not bound by a shared ideology but rather by common impatience with the Gandhian approach to independence, and they preached socialism less militantly than they demanded independence."¹⁰⁹ On the whole, the Independence for India League represented the militant left of the National Congress and was the most likely ally of the Indian Communism in the nationalist movement.

The Indian Communists, however, instead of allying themselves with the Independence League, were extremely suspicious and critical of it. In the All-India WPP meeting of December, 1928, the Independence League, ironically, came under heavier attack than the Indian National Congress party. The League, some of whose members were called "fascist" and "counter-revolutionaries", was defined as a "bourgeois organization" whose object was to impede the development of an independent mass movement. Its economic demands, such as the eight-hour day and unemployment compensation were termed as "calculated to bring Indian industrialism into line with modern bourgeois practice." The WPP members were specifically prohibited from joining the Independence League.¹¹⁰

The Communist International took a much stronger and severer attitude towards the Independence League. The Executive Committee of the Comintern in its letter dated December 2, 1928, explicitly instructed the All-India WPP to dissociate itself from it. The letter stated :

. . . . The greatest danger to the organization of the masses, to the creation of a revolutionary bloc of the proletariat and the peasantry and to the proletarian

leadership in this bloc, consists not only in bourgeois nationalism as such, but comes from the *organizations and groups of "prominent" petty-bourgeois intellectuals* actually influenced by the former, the "Independence League." . . . Your Conference . . . cannot fail to dissociate itself from the confusion and twaddle which characterizes the advertised League platform with its lavish promises.¹¹¹

The CPGB which disagreed with the Comintern's new policy towards the WPP, nevertheless conformed with its line in respect to the Independence League. Clemens Dutt writing in January, 1929, remarked that the League did not represent revolutionary socialism but reformist social democracy. In fact, he said, the League was "a challenge to the Workers' and Peasants' Party, an attempt to regain the ascendancy of the Nationalist bourgeois over the masses, which were in danger of escaping from bourgeois influence."¹¹²

The League, which enjoyed the support of a number of prominent members of the Congress party, operated as a pressure group within the nationalist movement. It never developed a well-articulated organizational structure or a mass following of its own. Its appeal was largely to the young members of the Congress party and in December, 1929, when the Congress party once again declared complete independence to be its goal, the League's existence came to an end.¹¹³

At the annual session of the Congress party held in December, 1928, at Calcutta, the radical and the conservative section of the Congress came to an open clash on the issue of dominion status versus complete independence. Although finally the Congress adopted the dominion status scheme it was not an easy passage. The evidence of the prevalence of radical younger force was attested when an amendment moved by Subhas Chandra Bose rejecting dominion status received 973 votes against 1,350 in favour of dominion status, and that also after Gaadhi had used all his personal and emotional appeal in order to defeat the amendment.¹¹⁴ An intelligence report of the period substantiates the view that Jawaharlal Nehru and the Independence for India League did succeed in mobilizing a considerable section of the

national movement in support of the demand for complete independence:

By the end of 1928, Jawahir Lal Nehru had established his Independence League, and the ideal of independence could command such a following that amongst the younger and more ardent spirit it completely swept away the more prudent counsels of the advocates of Dominion Status.¹¹⁶

Despite Motilal Nehru's ardent plea for moderation, pressure from the left-wing was thus too strong to be ignored. A compromise resolution was finally adopted at the Calcutta Congress. The British Government was given one year to grant dominion status, failing which demand for complete independence would be reinstated by resuming the non-cooperation movement.

Apart from this internal left-wing pressure, the general atmosphere of the country in 1928 with growing trade unionist and labour movements, also influenced the proceedings of the Congress session. In his presidential speech, Motilal Nehru referred to the rising discontentment among the workers and emphasized the importance of organizing workers and peasants in the national struggle. He said:

... The Congress has, all along, identified itself with the cause of Labour and Congressmen have uniformly cooperated with the leaders of the Labour movement in India in bringing about an improvement in the economic and social conditions of Labour and in supporting its claim for an equal voice with Capital or other interests in the solution of our political and economic problems. The year that will shortly close has, however, been marked by an acute condition of conflict between Labour and Capital in Bombay and elsewhere and the strikes and lock-outs that have arisen in consequence, as well as the unfortunate disturbances that have ensued, have not helped to secure an early and pacific settlement of the disputes between the employers and the employed. The authorities, who have stepped in on behalf of the employers, have not only raised the Communist bogey as an answer to the hungry labourer who fights for a living wages and for

the bare decencies of human living, but have resorted to shooting and violence in putting down strikes which must fill our heart with shame and sorrow. The Congress should actively intervene and take steps to secure the just demands of Labour and take it upon itself to strengthen their organization as part of national consolidation.¹¹⁶

The British Government did not fail to note the socialist tone of the Congress proceedings. The police report for the period noted:

The rapidly growing influence of the Communists was reflected in the proceedings of the recent session of the All-India National Congress at Calcutta. More than in any other previous congress, the Calcutta gathering showed that it was anxious to placate the labour extremists. Resolutions condemning the Public Safety Bill and the Trade Disputes Bill were passed, and it was decided that the Congress should take up the organization of the workers and peasants as parts of its future programme of constructive work for non-cooperation. Some communists have secured places in the AICC. . . .¹¹⁷

While the Congress was in session in Calcutta a huge labour demonstration took place: 20,000 Calcutta workers and peasants "broke open the Congress compound to assert their right under the aegis of the Indian National Congress." They took possession of the pandal for two hours and forced the Congress to delay beginning its session. The Congress leaders after failing to stop them, gave in and helped to organize a mass meeting of the workers and peasants which was presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru. Several labour leaders including Shibnath Bannerjee, Nimbkar and Joglekar also addressed the meeting. Motilal Nehru spoke to them as well as expressing his sympathy with their cause. A resolution was adopted at this mass meeting to the effect:

The mass meeting of the workers and peasants from all industries declare that we, the workers and peasants of the land shall not rest till complete independence is established and all exploitation from capitalism and

Imperialism cease. We do call upon the National Congress to keep that goal before them and organize the national forces for that purpose.¹¹⁸

Commenting on the incident the British intelligence report stated that "the fact that such an incident could have happened is an indication of the enormous increase in the influence and powers of the organizations of the workers."¹¹⁹

Youth Organizations

The same process of radicalization which led to the formation of a Congress left-wing also led to the emergence of various youth organizations in India. Till the middle of 1920's, the youth movement in India remained confined to the realization of nationalist urges and aspirations, and did not seriously consider socio-economic problems. By 1928, however, socialism and Marxism was clearly exerting their influences upon the youth of the country.

The left elements of the Indian National Congress who were trying to bring about a radicalization of the nationalist movement were also responsible for the emergence of a significant number of youth and student organizations in the country. So by 1928, when the Indian National Congress was held in Calcutta, such youth organizations as the All-India Youth League, the All-India Volunteer Corps, the Swadhin Bharat Sangha, the All-India Socialist Youth League and various other student organizations came into being and were holding their conferences. Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, Lala Lajpat Rai, K. F. Nariman and others were the prominent figures in this movement. Jawaharlal Nehru commenting on this development observed:

Another very noticeable feature of the India of 1928 was the growth of the Youth Movement. Everywhere youth leagues were being established, youth conferences were being held. They were a very varied lot, from semi-religious groups to others discussing revolutionary ideology and technique; but whatever their origin and auspices, such gatherings of youth always began to discuss the vital social and economic problems of the day,

and generally, their tendency was for root-and-branch change.¹²⁰

It is doubtful whether this observation actually corresponded to the actual situation. Most of these youth organizations had only nationalistic aspirations and although they did show some socialistic leanings, not all of them took it seriously. Of these the two most significant organizations were the All-India Youth Congress and the All-India Socialist Youth Congress.

The All-India Youth Congress met just before the National Congress sessions at Calcutta under the chairmanship of Subhas Chandra Bose, and more than 5,000 young people attended the meeting from all over the country. There were bitter revolutionary speeches but the accent was much more on independence than on socialism. Resolutions of the Congress welcomed the efforts of the League against Imperialism and declared that the cause of the WPP was the cause of the youth.¹²¹ Another significant youth organization, the Socialist Youth Congress, held its first session in Calcutta on 27th December, 1928, under the presidency of Jawaharlal Nehru.¹²² Its resolutions declared, like other youth organizations, its uncompromising support for complete independence and condemned the Government measures against the trade unions of the country. Its resolutions expressed a general socialist and Marxist trend of ideas. In his presidential address, Nehru remarked that the task of the young intellectuals was to explain socialism to the masses, and that "they must work and prepare a band of militant groups to carry out their ideas."¹²³ In its resolutions, the Socialist Youth Congress asserted that the nationalist movement must be given a new orientation by propagating the "Marxist world view" and that cooperation with socialist and other youth organizations outside India was to be maintained. It claimed that it stood for scientific socialism.¹²⁴ Communist influence upon the group was clearly discernible as the resolution of the organization on Communism stated that "considering the present social, political and economic conditions of the country Communism is the only way of realising complete social, political and economic freedom with all their implications."¹²⁵ The same resolution also declared:

This Congress of the Socialist Youth of India is of opinion that the dictatorship of the proletariat as the

vanguard of all exploited and oppressed elements of Indian Society including the peasant masses, should be a necessary stage in the country, for complete economic, social and political equality of the Indian people and the emancipation of the masses from the thralldom of their common enemy, the Indian bourgeoisie and British Imperialism.¹²⁶

The British intelligence report on "Development in the Communist situation in India from September 1928 to January 1929" specifically noted Jawaharlal Nehru's presidential address to the Bombay Presidency Youth Conference at Poona in which he said:

We must aim at the destruction of all imperialism and reconstruction of society on another basis. That basis must be one of cooperation and that was another name for socialism. Our national ideal must therefore, be the establishment of a cooperative Socialist Commonwealth and our international idea a world federation of socialist States. The voice that claims freedom must be the voice of revolt. When the voice is raised England will bow to the inevitable.¹²⁷

Apart from the left-wing within the Indian National Congress, Indian Youth Organizations also came under the influence and guidance of Indian Communists and their advisers of the CPGB. Some of them joined the Youth Communist League organized by the Communists and their activities were indistinguishable from the general Communist activities of the period.

The All-India Socialist Youth League was also very much under the Communist influences. It aimed at propagating the ideas and methods of scientific socialism among the youth of India as expounded by Marx and Lenin ; organizing study circles ; carrying on struggles against communalism, racialism, caste system and religion ; organizing trade unions and peasant unions, etc. The League had adopted the international Red Flag as its insignia.¹²⁸

In connection with the activities of the Indian Communist leaders in this field British intelligence report mentioned the various "instructional classes" which were held in various parts of the country during late 1928 and early 1929. The report recorded:

Philip Spratt and Muzaffar Ahmad, in order to expand the principle of their party, arranged a small instructional class in Bombay, to which C. G. Shah delivered a series of lectures on the Russian Revolution, Imperialism, the class struggle, etc. The Communist Policy of educating the masses to "class consciousness" was also pursued by the Bengal Peasants' and Workers' Party.¹²⁰

Lester Hutchinson, the British journalist who arrived in India in September, 1928, took active interest in the Youth Leagues of the country. Besides engaging in the activities of the Workers' and Peasants' party of Bombay, he established "study circles" for Young Indian intellectuals who soon "settled down to study the theory of communism."¹²¹ Philip Spratt also attempted to establish Communist-controlled "Youth Leagues" in his travels from "province to province" during the course of 1928.¹²¹

By early 1929, therefore, a clear direction was emerging in the Indian nationalist movement. Within the Indian National Congress itself a left-wing had developed which was becoming gradually socialist-oriented. At the same time, youth and peasant movements were also becoming leftist-minded. All these groups emphasized as their goals complete independence and radical socio-economic changes for India.

Thus the period January, 1928 to March, 1929, saw the radicalization of Indian political scene in almost every aspect. The tremendous surge in the influence and powers of the leftists, particularly the success of Communist infiltration within the working class movement of India, was amply manifested in the mobilization of labourers in strike movements. This development, as we shall see, caused a great deal of anxiety to the British Government. The Communists achieved remarkable success in organizing the trade unions and the WPP of India to serve as their platform of operation on an all-India basis. Socialistic trends were clearly visible in the development of the various youth organizations as well as in the formation of a distinct left-wing within the Indian National Congress. Along with the Comintern, the CPGB, and the radical faction of the British Labour Party, various other leftist international organizations contributed considerably to this insurgeance of socialist and Marxist activities in India during the period under review. The internal situation

in India at the time was also very conducive to the growth of left-wing activities. The poor economic conditions of the industrial labourers in the big cities, and of the peasants in the countryside, created an ideal atmosphere for the Communists to take advantage of. Moreover, the lack of a united nationalist leadership in the struggle against the British *Raj* at this time, also created a political vacuum which was most favorable for the growth of a Communist movement in India. However, the Communists did not fare so well in the political field as they did in the trade union and working class movement. Obviously full advantage of the prevailing conditions were not taken by the weak and factionalized CPI. Partly this can be explained in terms of the backwardness of the country, the religious—and caste-temperament of the people, the illiteracy of the workers and their being under the control of the liberal trade union leaders, the sway of the Indian National Congress over the vast majority of Indians and the Congress's preoccupation with nationalism, etc.

Insufficiency of funds was also a major obstacle during the period. Communist leaders like Sprnnt, Dange, Muzaffar Ahmad have all referred to the stringent financial conditions under which they had to work. A further limiting factor was the low ideological awareness of the Communist workers. A British intelligence report of 1928 maintained:

It is doubtful, however, whether the indigenous labour agitator is a communist at heart. He is ordinarily a man of little education, who has acquired a smattering of Bolshevik theory and who is able to impress the ignorant workers with violent harangues interlarded with the catch-words and slogans employed by the communist tub-thumper.¹⁸²

But probably the biggest deterrent to the growth of a strong Communist Party of India was a policy directive from the Comintern during the period that did not take Indian conditions in account.

In spite of these drawbacks within the Communist movement the activities and the political mood current in the country in 1928-1929 appeared "dangerous and threatening" to the Government of India. For the officials, this rising tide of leftism held a potential threat to the very existence of the Empire in India.

The supposed danger from Soviet Union was becoming more and more a reality, and the Government was increasingly determined to meet the threat and check the growth of Communism in India. We shall now see what steps it contemplated and took to achieve this end.

CHAPTER II

British Policy towards The Left-Wing of India

INTERNATIONAL Communism and general leftist activities in India progressed at a rapid pace during the year 1928. The growing Communist influences in the trade unions, the labour and peasant organizations as well as in the general political field constituted a challenge by Moscow to Britain's rule in India—and the British were determined to meet it. The various measures undertaken by the Government of India during the period from January, 1928 to March, 1929, for this purpose, will be discussed below.

Government's concern with the growth of Communism

The Government's attitude to the whole issue can be better understood if we stop to examine the nature of the Communist threat from the official point of view. The special police reports and Intelligence Bureau investigations¹ concerning Communism in India prior to 1929 sheds light with regard to this inquiry since it is obvious that these reports were heavily relied upon and that they had exercised considerable influence upon the policy and measures undertaken by the Government later to deal with the situation. "Communism" from a purely theoretical and ideological stand-point was given little, if any, attention by the investigating authorities. Rather the term "Communism" was often taken to stand for "Soviet Russian policy", the "Bolshevik menace", "Comintern policy", and the like. In short, to the Indian authorities, Communism was implicitly the "Soviet intrigues against the British Empire."² Sir David

Petric, Director of Intelligence Bureau, in his comprehensive report on Communism in India, in 1926, described the nature of this "Bolshevik menace" in these terms:

Sir Cecil Kaye rightly saw the germ of a definite Communist plot against India in the "Thesis", passed at the second Congress of the Communist International in 1920, which stated that "the nationalist movement in the Colonial and semi-Colonial countries was objectively fundamentally a revolutionary struggle, and as such it formed a part of the struggle for world revolution." There can be no doubt whatever (and recent events in China have proved this still more conclusively) that Great Britain has drawn upon herself the main force of the Bolshevik attack, . . . partly as one of the Chief bulwarks against the world wide revolution which the Bolshevik regard as the essential condition of their ultimate success. The Bolsheviks are convinced that in the British Empire the most vulnerable point is India . . . and they cherish it as an article of faith that "till India is liberated, Russia will not be rid of the menace of England."³

After the brief Anglo-Afghan war of 1919 it was feared by the British Government that the Bolsheviks would join the Afghans in mounting a full-scale war of liberation on India, however, due to Soviet military weakness this was not considered a real danger. The road to overt conquest being closed, it was believed that the Bolsheviks would employ covert means through subversive activities to gain their ends.

The Government's concern regarding the exact nature of Communist objectives were obvious. Citing one of M. N. Roy's letters to Muzaffar Ahmad addressed to the organizational problem of Communism in India, the Intelligence Bureau report in 1927 concluded that according to the Communist strategy, "the Communist Party was to remain a secret organization, but there was also to be an open Mass Party" which would include revolutionaries and nationalists, "with the immediate objective of the overthrow of the British and the remoter one of establishing 'the dictatorship of the Proletariat'." From this it was inferred that "the first objective of Communism in India was to capture

and control existing nationalist organizations, such as the Indian National Congress."⁴ In the official view the second most important objective of the Communists was to infiltrate into and capture the labour movement and the youth organizations of India thereby gaining strong grounds for conducting mass movements against British Imperialism.⁵

These objectives, it was believed, were to be achieved by following the programmes and plans of campaign outlined by the Communist International.⁶ The methods to be employed were deemed to include (a) creation of Workers' and Peasants' parties, Youth Leagues and Youth organizations, etc. dominated and guided by the Communists; (b) ingression of Communists into existing trade unions, nationalist and other political organizations with the desire to capture their leadership and obtain their support in the interest of the Communist International; (c) encouragement of strikes, demonstrations and agitations; (d) propagation of Communist ideology and principles by speeches, letters, newspapers, pamphlets, etc.⁷

British officials, in fact, were keeping a close watch on the growth of the Communist movement in the country and their private correspondence reveals their concern about the activities of left-wing leaders (both inside and outside India) since the conclusion of the Kanpur Bolshevik Conspiracy Case in November, 1924. The unconditional release of Nalini Gupta and Muzaffar Ahmad, both sentenced in the Kanpur Case, on health grounds in September, 1925, caused a great deal of anxiety to the British authorities in India. David Petrie, Director of the Intelligence Bureau, in his letter to Mr. J. Crerar, Member of the Home Department (Political), Government of India, wrote on 21st January, 1926:

... the fact that Muzaffar Ahmad was released absolutely unconditionally, his speedy return to his old courses points the moral that men of his kidney should never be released except on strict conditions of continued good behaviour. If Muzaffar Ahmad is sufficiently restored to health to be able to do what he is reported to be doing, the proper place for him is in jail.⁸

By 1928 developments in the left-wing political situation of India clearly indicated to the Government authorities that the Commu-

nists were achieving considerable success in gaining their objectives through their prescribed methods. As noted in Chapter I above, the Communists did secure a strong footing in the trade union movement of India in 1928-29. They were especially successful in organizing and staging large strikes and demonstrations. The Workers' and Peasants' Party provided the ideal platform from which the Communists launched their propaganda among the masses of India. Moreover, a powerful section of the Indian National Congress and the rapidly growing youth movement of the country were increasingly leaning towards Socialist and Marxist ideologies and principles. The strike waves of 1928 and early 1929 disrupting the industrial set-up of the country as well as the prevalent economic discontent generated a hostile atmosphere between management and workers which was being thoroughly exploited by the Communists to further their goals.

In addition to all these, the Indian National Congress announced its decision in December, 1928, that if Dominion Status was not granted within a year, a nation-wide civil disobedience campaign would be resumed under Mahatma Gandhi. This threat was viewed as a potentially dangerous opening for a successful Communist manoeuvre. As it was pointed out by Sir David Petrie in 1927:

The Non-co-operation movement was hailed in Moscow as something admirably adapted to the furtherance of her designs against India. . . . What the Soviet desires is not the conversion of India to the Communist creed (for it expressly recognises that in Eastern countries the nationalist spirit must be stimulated and played upon) but such a general upheaval, such a wide-spread outbreak of disorder as will render a continuance of our rule impossible. Now in Non-co-operation we have had a clear illustration of a state of affairs after Russia's own heart, an upheaval which, even without outside direction or assistance, shook our authority as it has seldom been shaken.⁹

The situation thus presented to the responsible officers a picture of the threat of Communism becoming a reality. The Home Department of the Government of India was realizing the need to take appropriate steps to meet this growing danger. Apart from

the increased leftist activities in different phases of Indian political scene during 1928, the sudden surge in terrorist activities as well as the impending threat of a massive civil disobedience movement compounded the pressure on the Government to take immediate measures to check the spread of Communism.

Various measures were contemplated to this end. It was acknowledged by the investigating officers that Communists had very little success in India in the period prior to the Kanpur Bolshevik Conspiracy Case of 1924. The Director of Intelligence Bureau reporting in 1927 stated that although the Kanpur Case proved "conclusively the existence of a Bolshevik conspiracy" in India, its success was limited. He said:

The question is: To what extent did Roy and his fellow-conspirators succeed in implanting Bolshevism in India as a political force to be reckoned with? The answer is: To all appearances, very little.¹⁰

The remarkable success of Communism in India in the post-1924 period, particularly during 1927-28, was attributed largely to the success of the foreign agents and emissaries sent by the Communist Party of Great Britain and other international bodies. It was believed that the organizational abilities of these men supported by foreign remittances were the chief cause of the expansion of "leftism" in India. The Viceroy was, therefore, urged to take measures to counter this problem of foreign agents most effectively. Thus the special police report on Communism in India warned the Government in 1928:

After the comparative failure of M. N. Roy's organization to achieve any tangible results in India, the success of the new methods (delegation of Allison, Spratt, Bradley, Johnstone, Ryan, etc.) with the consequent upheaval in industrial circles in India, is bound to encourage the Soviet leaders to still further efforts. The menace of communism to the peace in India is looming larger than ever, and unless the authorities are armed with wider powers to deal with the leaders of the movement in this country (especially those imported from outside), the events of the next year or two may well be fraught with the greatest consequences of the security of the country.¹¹

That a great deal of importance was given to the matter is evidenced from the secret correspondence between the Viceroy Lord Irwin and the Secretary of State for India, Lord Birkenhead, on the issue. Commenting on the Communist activity in India the Viceroy wrote on May 24, 1928:

. . . though these movements are still in their infancy and may not be a serious menace in India for some little time, nevertheless they contain great potentialities of danger, and we are bound therefore to see what steps can be taken to discourage them while they are weak and prevent anything in the nature of rapid growth. . . . We must consider what we can do in the way of preventing the Indian movement, which by itself is very weak, from receiving any impetus from outside either in the form of money or what is still more important, of brains and organising capacity.¹²

As far as financial aid in the form of remittances from abroad was concerned, the Viceroy was convinced that the situation was not very serious though a draft ordinance to deal with the matter was already being considered.

A comparatively small sum had been [remitted] for the Bombay strike and another for the East Indian Railway Strike. Both these remittances are in the nature of "tokens of fraternal solidarity", and it is probably that Moscow is not prepared to proceed further but we must be ready for possible eventualities. As the method of proceeding by Ordinance is not satisfactory, we shall also consider whether we should introduce in the coming Simla session a regular Bill designed to deal with such foreign remittances in a more comprehensive way.¹³

A more serious threat, in the official view, was the impetus which the nascent left-wing movement of the country was receiving from British and other European Communists in India whose arrival and activities synchronized with the growing labour unrest. So the Viceroy suggested:

With regard to the second point, namely preventing the movement being stimulated by British or foreign workers, I am considering whether powers can be taken to deport British subjects as we now deport foreign-



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ers. . . . I think it is important that we bear in mind, that we require, not only to prevent access of communists from outside, but prevent Indians going abroad and receiving communist training which may convert them into formidable agents on their return. This check we endeavour to exercise at present through the passport system, and indeed I do not at the moment see in what other way this danger could be dealt with. We must in some form or other retain the power to prevent Indians going abroad if we have no power, as I think we cannot have to prevent their returning.¹⁴

Regular fortnightly Intelligence Bureau reports on Communist activity in India for the period of late 1927 and 1928 repeatedly pointed to the increasing militancy and left-ward leaning of the growing trade unionist and workers' movement in the country.¹⁵ Finally the Government decided to take certain legislative measures with a view to deal with the situation and the Removal from India Bill (or the Public Safety Bill) and the Trades Disputes Bill were introduced in the Legislative Assembly during the later part of 1928.

Public Safety Bill

As was suggested by the Viceroy in his letter to the Secretary of State on May 1928, British and other foreign agents proved the most difficult subject to be dealt with by the Government and the two most important persons in this respect who demanded their close attention were the British Communists Philip Spratt and Benjamin F. Bradley. Almost all police reports of the period underlined the importance of these two men in successfully carrying out Communist organizational work in India. On July 8, 1928, the Viceroy in his "private and personal" telegram to the Secretary of State informed:

We have proposed a draft Bill to provide for deportation from British India of persons like Brndley and Spratt. This will be discussed at the Council meeting with a view to reaching a decision as to whether legislation on these lines should be introduced at the Simla session. We have not thought it advisable, for reasons

which I need not trouble you at the moment, to pursue the idea of a comprehensive Bill which would control ingress as well as give powers of deportation.¹⁰

Spratt and Bradley had been operating with remarkable effectiveness within India, but under existing laws British nationals were immune from arrest and deportation unless they violated the common law. Extraordinary legislative powers were necessary to deal with the situation. When the autumn session of the Indian Legislative Assembly was convened in September, 1928, the Government of India, to tighten their defences against Communism, introduced the Public Safety (or Removal from India) Bill.

The Bill was to be applied to a person who (a) "directly or indirectly advocated the overthrow by force or violence, of the Government established by law in British India or the unlawful interference with the ownership of property" or (b) "sought to foment or utilise industrial or agrarian disputes or other disputes of a like nature with the object of subverting organised Government in British India" or (c) "was member of or was acting in association with any society or organisation whether in British India or elsewhere."¹¹

The consideration of the Bill, involving debates which lasted for days at a time, became the central feature of the autumn and winter sessions of the Assembly. As the official Home Department publication, *India in 1928-29*, reports: "During the two sessions of the Legislative Assembly included in the period under review the Public Safety Bill occupied the main interest of the House and raised the strong and uncompromising opposition of the Congress and National Parties."¹²

The Bill was introduced in the Legislative Assembly on September 6, 1928, and was directed "against persons not being Indian British Subjects, or Subjects of an Indian State", designing to overthrow British Government in India "by certain destructive methods, which may be summed up as the methods of communism." The Bill proposed remedy in the form of deportation "by order of the Governor-General-in-Council who was to be given power to remove from India, British and foreign communist agents."¹³ In moving the Bill, Mr. J. Crerar, the Home Member of Government of India, argued that there was nothing more destructive of an ordered society than the doctrine and practice

of Communism, and this doctrine had been introduced into India not merely in theory but also in practice. He pointed out that subversive and reprehensible doctrines were being hatched and propagated in India and the movement had to be checked.

The Government had evidence that the doctrine of Communism was spreading in India. What Communism implied, in the Government's view, was to be found in the draft programme of the Communist International which advocated "destruction of capitalists, replacing of the Soviet Army, concentration of arms in the hands of the proletariat, expropriation of landlords, nationalisation of large enterprises, confiscation of church lands and promotion of general strikes."²⁰ Tracing the history of Communist activities Mr. Crerar alluded to the Kanpur Conspiracy Case of 1924 in which four accused, including Mr. Muzaffar Ahmad, were convicted and sentenced. Then there was a slackening of their activities for a while followed by a resurgence in 1926 with the arrival of certain British Communists, first, in the person of Allison, who was removed from India, then with the arrival of Spratt and Bradley, who continued activities during the last year and a half. Mr. Crerar told the Assembly that the sufferings and privations of labourers in India were due to the Communists' activities. In conclusion he said:

I have convincing evidence that sinister and external influence has been and is at work. . . . We have not to deal with mere visionary and fantastic theories realisation of which postulates complete destruction of the existing social order but with a persistent and definite design to take the first and then ultimate steps to put them into operations.²¹

The Bill was energetically opposed within the Assembly by Congressmen under the leadership of Pandit Motilal Nehru and Lala Lajpat Rai, the independents under Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas and the labour leaders represented by Mr. N. M. Joshi. In voicing his objection to the Bill, Lala Lajpat Rai said that so far as he knew "there were only two persons suspected to be Communist agents. One of them had been in jail ever since he arrived in India and the other was one Mr. Spratt." Lajpat Rai did not know much about Spratt but it was absurd to suppose, he said, that one man could be instrumental in bringing

about all these strikes and disturbances, although this was the only material placed before the House to justify a drastic legislation like the Public Safety Bill. On principle no penal law should be enacted except when there was absolute necessity for doing so. Regulation III of 1818 and even the Indian Penal Code were sufficient to deal with any such kind of guilt but the Government were bent upon burdening further the Indian taxpayer. He was afraid that this measure was designed not only against the foreigners but eventually it would be used against the Nationalists and those persons who advocated the cause of the labourers. "Thus under this law the Government could one day say that as Mr. Srinivasa Iyengar and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru advocated Independent Government they were Bolsheviks and, therefore, could easily be deported."²²

Mr. Srinivasa Iyengar objecting to the Bill contended that "no proof had been furnished that the British Government was going to be destroyed or the Indian society subverted." It was, he accused, the will of a police officer, a district officer or a commercial magnate strong enough to press his view which the Governor-General-in-Council accepted without enquiry. He opposed the Bill because, firstly, it was highly repressive and, secondly, it was based on the principle of racial discrimination. He believed that the Bill was designed to promote unfriendly relations between India and the foreign Governments, though India desired to remain on friendly terms with all nations. "If the Government wanted to shut out the British Communists, let the British Government prevent their coming out to India."²³

Mr. N. M. Joshi, representative of organized labour, said that it was true that the present industrial unrest prompted the Government to undertake legislation. He was not a Communist, but a participator in the labour movement. As one interested in the labour movement he did not hate any class, but hated the system. The Bill was designed to penalize the preaching of certain doctrines which were helping the labouring classes. He knew instances when the authorities declined to negotiate with the labour leaders in India, but waited for an Englishman like Mr. Bradley to turn up and speak on their behalf. And the Bill was designed against such an Englishman.²⁴

Pandit Motilal Nehru, leading spokesman of the Indian

National Congress, opposed the Bill and contended that no case had been made out for urgency and necessity of the Bill nor had it been shown why the ordinary laws in the possession of the Government could not be utilized against those whom the Government regarded as undesirable. "It was a false argument to say that merely because after Bradley and Spratt came to India there were Railway disasters and strikes, there should be some law to deport such persons." Referring to the clause in the proposed Bill which stipulated objectionable persons could be deported without any trial Pandit Nehru said that, "in England where dangers of Communism were greater than they were or could be in India, there was a trial and conviction before punishment or exclusion or any other form. Even in the pre-war and post-war legislation against undesirables England had distinctly provided for trial. But under the Bill before the House the position would be different. It was the inherent right of every Englishman to be tried under the Habeas Corpus but that right would be denied in India." Moreover, he was afraid that the provisions of the Bill might be used indiscriminately against Englishmen who were sympathetic to the cause of the Indian nationalists. The Bill did not specifically mention "Communists", but provided for the expulsion of foreigners who advocated the overthrow of the Government by force of violence and sought to foment or utilize industrial or agrarian unrest to that end. Consequently, Nehru predicted that it would not be long before the Bill was applied to Indian Communists and nationalists as well. Furthermore, he pointed out, a good many Englishmen were invited to attend the Congress every year and as the President of the Calcutta Congress he might have to extend invitations to friends of the Congress in England and elsewhere. How was he to know that the Government would regard them otherwise? "The Bill would also stand against the promotion of social and intellectual intercourse between Indians and people of other Asiatic countries."²⁵

Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas speaking for the independents refused to be a party under any threat to the dangerous legislation by which persons could be deported without trial unless the Government took the Assembly into the complete confidence by placing all the information in their possession. He affirmed that

the Government had already powers under Regulation III of 1818 to deal with Communism. Why, then, did they want more powers?²⁶

In an effort to dramatize the dangers of Communism in India and to prepare the public for stern measures to come, in August the Government released to the press the contents of a letter dated December 30, 1927, which M. N. Roy had written to the Central Committee of the CPI and the WPP. This document later became known as the Assembly Letter after passages from it were read out in the Legislative Assembly on September 10 during the debate over the Public Safety Bill. In it Roy urged the CPI to formally affiliate with the Comintern and the WPP with the League Against Imperialism. The letter was useful to the Government in its anti-Communist crusade because it revealed not only the international aspect of the Communist conspiracy but also the attempt to use the WPP as a legal cover for Communist activity in India and the extent of financial assistance and direction from Moscow via Roy's Foreign Bureau in Europe.²⁷

After the Bill was discussed and debated for four days in the Assembly, it was referred to a Select Committee which did not include any representation of the Swarajist, Congress, Nationalist or Labour members. The Select Committee introduced some insignificant modifications to the Bill. The duration of the Bill was limited, in the first instance, to five years, and its scope was reduced by excluding from its provisions British subjects ordinarily residents in British India. Another safeguard was the provision giving all accused persons the right of appeal before a Tribunal of three Session Judges (these could not be High Court Judges) whose decision would be final.²⁸

The modified version of the Bill as reported by the Select Committee was acceptable to the Government and the latter were very hopeful of having it passed without delay. The Viceroy and the Secretary of State were in touch regularly on the development of the situation with regard to the Bill. Reporting the situation on September 23, 1928, the Viceroy in his "private and personal" telegram to the Secretary of State informed him:

In regard to the Removal Bill the present position is that Select Committee have reported unanimously, making certain changes which are being telegraphed officially

to you. The changes are of some importance, but we can accept them. The Bill will come on again in the Assembly on Monday 24th, and we hope that we shall be able to pass the Bill without further amendments by the end of Tuesday, 25th. The Bill will, in that case, go on to the Council of State ; and will become law by the end of session. . . . Our view has always been that we should try to secure this legislation with least possible delay.²⁹

Despite these developments, the Government failed to secure passage of the Bill when it was put to vote in the Assembly on September 24, 1928. It was defeated sixty-two to sixty-one³⁰ when the President of the Assembly broke a tie to vote against its adoption, saying:

If any individual member seeks to place such an extraordinary measure on the statute book he must convince the House and get a majority in his favour. The Home Member has failed to secure a clear majority in his favour and cannot expect the Chair to give his casting vote in favour of the motion for consideration.³¹

The Viceroy did not certify the Bill and decided to re-introduce it in the next session of the Assembly. He explained his strategy in almost identical words to his superior in London and his subordinates, the provincial Governors:

The Public Safety Bill, as you have seen, was defeated in the Assembly by the President's casting vote and I have been carefully considering what lines we should take in the matter. The possibility of certification had of course been present in my mind, but there seemed to me to be two or three decisive reasons against it. For one thing I felt that it would be difficult to make out that a real emergency existed, for although I am fully alive to the background of communism which lies behind a good many of the strikes in India today, I do not think that in the state of affairs which exists at present it can be said that legislation was essential at all costs. . . . In the second place, we hope to run a conspiracy case against a considerable number of communists in India including Spratt and Bradley if we can

get a clear case against them. . . . We have therefore decided that I should not proceed to certification this session, but that subject to any alternative in the general position we should aim at re-introducing the Bill or one like it in the Delhi session.³²

The Interval between the two sessions of the Assembly saw a further increase in labour unrest and militancy in trade union and other left-wing activities in India. As a result, the Indian banking and business interests as well as the Government officials at the local level (especially those of Bombay and Bengal) pressed the Central Government for immediate action to deal with the situation.³³ A conspiracy case against the notable left leaders of the country was already being considered by the Indian Government and the Secretary of State suggested more drastic measures than those specified in the proposed Public Safety Bill should be considered.

The powers that the Public Safety Bill will give, though they will cover the existing loophole through which European British subjects slip, are not operative against Indian subjects, and even when it is passed, we shall have no means of dealing summarily with Indian Communists except Regulation III, the use of which excites comment sooner or later. All informations that the activities of the Indian Communists whether or not they openly describe themselves as such are rapidly on the increase and I am considering whether the time has not now come to take power to deal drastically with the Communist agitation and propaganda comprehensively. . . . What I have in mind is that all bodies which advocate communist doctrines or have communistic connections whether in India or outside it should be proclaimed to be illegal and membership of them punishable. . . . I appreciate the difficulties and realise that such action would cause an outcry as being an attempt to stifle freedom of opinion, but a line of criticism which is tenable in the west is not necessarily applicable in very different conditions of India.³⁴

The Bill was re-submitted in the Legislative Assembly, when it convened again in January 1929, at Delhi, in a revised form.

with additional provisions to empower the Government to seize money sent from abroad to finance Communist agitation in India.¹⁵ Once again the Bill was bitterly opposed by the non-official members of the Assembly and Pandit Motilal Nehru, predicting that the new clause would be used to cut his party from its sources of overseas support, argued that the Bill was aimed as much against the Congress party as the CPI. "After all," he observed, "we are all revolutionaries." Both parties sought the subversion of the British Government in India. The only difference between Congressmen and the Communists, he continued, was on the question of method—whether violence was to be employed or not.¹⁶

However, in spite of the opposition the Bill was referred to a Select Committee which did not contain any member of the Swarnjist or Nationalist parties. The Select Committee presented a unanimous report acceptable to the Government. But before further steps could be taken in the Assembly, the Government decided to launch a massive Conspiracy Case against the leading left-wing leaders of India. On March 20, 1929, thirty-one alleged Communists were arrested simultaneously all over India on a charge of conspiring to deprive the King of sovereignty of British India.

Trades Disputes Act, 1929

The outbreak of industrial unrest on a large scale after World War I led the Government of India to explore the possibility of providing some machinery for the settlement of industrial disputes. The question was first taken up in 1919, but after consultation with the local governments, the Government of India came to the conclusion that at that time any legislation of the kind was likely to be ineffective. The succeeding years saw a distinct change in the position by reason of the growth of organizations of industrial workers and of the increasing influence exercised by public opinion on the course of disputes. Consequently the Government of India took up the matter again in 1924. As a result of extensive enquiries made in 1924-25 and the information which became available since then it was decided in 1928 to legislate an act for the prevention and settlement of trade

disputes. Accordingly, along with the Public Safety Bill, the Government sought the passage of the Indian Trades Disputes Bill in the Central Legislative Assembly in order to check the menacingly growing Communist activity in trade unions of India. The Trade Disputes Bill was introduced in the Assembly on September 4, 1928 and was reconsidered during the budget session of the Indian Legislative Assembly at Delhi. In moving the Bill, Sir Bhupendra Nath Mitra said that the fundamental principle underlying the Bill was that trade dispute was not a matter for concern of the employers only, but concerned the community as a whole. "Recent experiences of the past few years had brought home to all the gravity of the situation arising out of trade disputes."³⁷

The Bill was divided into three main parts. The first related to the establishment of Courts of Enquiry, Conciliation Boards and tribunals for investigation and settlement of trade disputes. The second part declared it illegal to withdraw labour from public utility services such as Railways, Postal Services, Telegraphs, Telephones, Water & Light Supply, Public Conservancy and Royal Marine Service unless each individual going on strike obtained permission or gave one month's notice in writing. It made it a penal offence for the workers employed on monthly wages in public utility services to strike without previous notice and also provided heavier penalties for persons abetting such an offence.³⁸ The third part of the Bill declared such strikes illegal as had any object other than or in addition to the furtherance of a trade dispute within the trade or industry in question, or those strikes which inflicted hardships upon the community, or were intended, in the opinion of the Government, to coerce it.³⁹ The Bill also prohibited sympathetic strikes and fraternal funds for supporting strikes.⁴⁰

Section 17 of the Bill provided that anybody who declared, instigated or incited others to take part in, or act in furtherance of such a strike shall be liable to three months imprisonment and Rs. 200 fine. Section 18 protected those persons who refused to take part in such strikes from any actions against them on the part of their union. Moreover, such persons could claim compensation from the union.⁴¹

The Bill was opposed unanimously by the nationalist leaders.

as well as the labour leaders both within and outside the Assembly. The Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress held in December 1928, expressed its indignant criticism of the Bill in no uncertain terms and the Subject Committee of the All-India Congress Committee (A.I.C.C.) passed the resolution: "That this Congress expresses its emphatic protest against the Trade Disputes Bill and the Public Safety Bill which it regards as a wholly reactionary attempt to restrict the growth of [the] organized labour movement and as an absolutely unjustifiable infringement upon the rights of the people."⁴² The Bill was opposed by both the left-wing and the right-wing leaders of the labour movement. The Government labour nominee, Mr. N. M. Joshi published a statement in which he criticized it strongly saying:

This shows an unfavourable change in the attitude of the Government of India towards Labour. . . . The second part of the Bill which deals with strikes and lock-outs in public utility services is the most controversial as well as objectionable. . . . I want to emphasize that the Government of India is attempting to pass legislation which is more drastic than the old British legislation of 1875. . . . Even eminent judges in England have admitted that although the law regarding the relation between master and servants provides for penalties for master as well as servant, the law has hardly been used against masters. Moreover, in a state of society where capitalists dominate the Government, the law is bound to be used against workers. . . . I shall have to oppose the whole Bill. . . .⁴³

The Bengal Trade Union Federation held a special meeting on September 2, 1928 and condemned the Bill, and proposed to organize a campaign of opposition to it. The Jharia session of the All-India Trade Union Congress in December, 1928, passed a strongly worded resolution condemning the Bill *in toto* and deciding for a general strike against it.⁴⁴

In the course of the Assembly debate over the Bill, Dewan Chamanlal said that the Bill would, far from preventing disputes, increase the number of labour disputes in India.⁴⁵

In spite of these oppositions, the Bill was referred to a Select Committee on February 11, 1929, which while introducing some

modifications in detail, left the principles of the measure unchanged. The notable changes made by the Select Committee were that it restricted the duration of the measure to a period of five years and inserted a provision penalizing a lock-out in a public utility service if declared without giving previous notice to the employees.

Other Government Measures

The alarm of the Government in 1928-29 over Communist gains was un concealed. Its annual report *India in 1928-29* records: "The growth of the communist propaganda and influence especially among the industrial classes of certain large towns, caused anxiety to the authorities."⁴⁶ Liberal groups in England echoed the alarm as well, as the *Manchester Guardian* of August 1929 stated: "Experience of the past two years has shown that the industrial workers in the biggest centers are peculiarly malleable material in the hands of unscrupulous communist organisers."⁴⁷ A section of the Indian press joined in the outcry as well when the *Bombay Chronicle* reported: "Socialism is in the air, for months past socialistic principles have been preached in India at various conferences, especially those of peasants and workers."⁴⁸

Thus during the late 1928 and early 1929 the Government began its full offensive to counter the rise of the Communist movement in India. Apart from the Public Safety Bill and the Trades Disputes Act, the Government sought some local measures to deal with the increasing industrial unrest particularly in the big cities. Calcutta already had its Act which was known as the "Goonda Act" ("*Goonda*" being an Indian word for "hoodlum"). Under this Act the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, could direct any person whom he considered about to commit an act involving a breach of peace, intimidation or an offence against any person or property, to remove himself from Calcutta for a period of one year or failing this he would be liable to be imprisoned for one year.

Such an Act as this was not in force in Bombay and in August, 1929, a bill called the Bombay Prevention of Intimidation Act, 1929, was introduced in the Bombay Legislative

Council, and it was closely modelled on the "Gnonda Act" of Bengal. The mill-owners' representatives, both Indian and British, were unanimously in favour of it. Mr. Hotson in moving the Bill advocated the measure for reasons connected with the strike movement in Bombay.⁴⁹ The Act in Clause 5 gave power to the Commissioner of Police or a District Magistrate to deal with any person when he thought that person was about to commit a non-cognisable offence against any person or property. Any such person if considered to be dangerous could be forcibly removed from the Presidency for a period of six months.

Another measure the Bombay provincial government took following the large number of mill strikes in 1928 was to appoint a Riot Enquiry Committee in October 1928. The Chairman of this Committee of Enquiry was Sir Charles Fawcett, Judge of the High Court of Judicature, Bombay. As most of the strikes which hit the Bombay textile industries in 1928 were against the Standardisation Scheme of the mill-owners which would have resulted in large scale unemployment and intensification of work, the Fawcett Committee was asked by the Government of Bombay to examine the Standardisation Scheme and find out how it could be introduced without causing hardship to workers.

The one constructive measure which the Government initiated during the period was the appointment of a Royal Commission of Enquiry to investigate into the labour situation of India. On January 28, 1929, the Viceroy addressing the opening session of the Indian Legislative Assembly, announced that "His Majesty's Government has decided to appoint a Royal Commission to undertake an enquiry into India's labour problems with due regard to the economic position of the industries in India and to explore all aspects of the problems affecting the conditions under which industrial labourers work." Mr. Whitley, formerly Speaker of the House of Commons, was selected as Chairman of the Commission.⁵⁰

All these steps were expected to result in containing the Communist movement in India. However, by the end of September, 1928, when the Public Safety Bill was defeated in the Assembly, the number of strikes in the industrial sector were increasing. The Government of India was already sensing that these measures were not sufficient to deal with the seriousness of

the situation. By September, 1928, it was the considered opinion of the investigating officers of the Government of India that mere legislative measures were not enough as they were at best preventive in nature only. They recommended more severe punitive actions.

Decision to Launch a Conspiracy Case

Immediately after the completion of the Kanpur Bolshevik Case in 1924, the Government, as noted earlier, had started a systematic enquiry and investigation into the growing Communist movement in India. Detailed secret reports were regularly compiled by the Intelligence Bureau, Home Department, Government of India, and by the local police departments on the activities of the prominent leftist leaders both inside and outside India and on the development of the movement in general.⁵¹ These reports clearly reflect the increasing concern of the Home Department with the growth of Communism in India during the period from 1925 to 1928. So that when Sir David Petrie submitted his official report on "Communism in India" on September 1, 1927, he emphatically pointed this menacing danger and urged the Government to take immediate steps in the matter. The Government, he suggested, must take strict measures against "any loophole whatsoever by which the agents and doctrines of Communism might find admission to this Country." He also warned that

It would be as little justifiable for the Government to relax its vigilance in time of peace as it would be for our health authorities to discard precautions when the public health is at its best. Wherever Communism manifests itself, it should be met and stamped out like the plague. The spread of Communism in India is not a case of these problems which may be looked at from a particular 'angle of vision'; it must be looked straight in the face, and it must be fought with the most unrelenting opposition.⁵²

Though the possibility of launching a big conspiracy case against the prominent left-wing leaders was being considered from 1927, the first concrete reference to it is found in Lord Irwin's "secret"

telegram to the Secretary of State for India, on September 13, 1928. At the time the Public Safety Bill was making a difficult and slow progress in the Legislative Assembly and referring to this the Viceroy informed his superior:

We are at present considering the possibility of running a comprehensive conspiracy case against the principal communist leaders throughout India. . . . and in such a case the activities of Spratt in particular would be an essential element. If therefore, we find after thorough examination of the evidence, which will not be completed for another month or six weeks, that there is a good case, we should not take action against Spratt and Bradley under the new Act, but would prosecute them under the ordinary law.¹⁵³

In fact, the Viceroy was already more hopeful about launching the case rather than waiting for the Public Safety Bill to pass and to be enforceable against Philip Spratt and Ben Bradley, the two most dangerous agents on the scene. The Home Government, however, were less enthusiastic in this respect. Thus, replying to Lord Irwin's above telegram, the Secretary of State on September 18, 1928 categorically stated his preference to press on with the enactment of the Public Safety Bill rather than launching a conspiracy case.

I hope you will be able to press on with the Bill, but even if that has to be carried over next Session, I feel strongly that the launching of a comprehensive conspiracy case will not afford any really good reason for postponing legislation. As regards such a trial I feel doubtful at present of the possibility of putting before court legal proof of existence and character of associations outside India. I am consulting Home Office and will let you know what they say.¹⁵⁴

The Home Government's chief concern in this matter was that no legal action should be taken against a British subject. Lord Birkenhead made this point very clear in his above telegram to Lord Irwin.

In this connection I presume you have no intention of indicting any one at present in England. That would of course raise the question of toleration by His Majesty's

government of tolerance here. Apart from this, I am sure you will consider carefully the consequences of launching an elaborate trial either before or after Removal Bill becomes a law. If trial takes place before legislation, then whatever its result it would surely be much more difficult to legislate, since Bill could be represented either as unnecessary, or as a vindictive attempt to secure for executive power of deporting persons who had been acquitted by Court. Yet the necessary dealing with outside agitators clever enough to avoid commission of specific offence would remain unimpaired. If you secure legislation, you would have a permanent weapon against outside agitators. You might of course still desire to launch trial against persons some of whom are Indians, but an acquittal would make it practically impossible to deport the English members of conspiracy, one of whom would have been twice acquitted. I need not at present comment on technical difficulties of trying European and Indian British subjects together.⁵⁵

The Home Government's objections were treated with utmost urgency by the Intelligence Bureau⁵⁶ and the Director of Intelligence Bureau, Mr. Isenonger, argued very strongly in support of launching the conspiracy case. In refuting the Secretary of State's apprehension about the likely consequences of an elaborate trial for conspiracy, and that it might affect the enactment of the Public Safety Bill, he argued:

It appears to me that there is some misunderstanding in regard to the immediate object of the Removal Bill, in that it is believed that it is introduced solely in order to deal with the two British Communists now in India, Messrs Spratt and Bradley. The same line of thought was apparent in many of the speeches delivered by the Opposition during the debate on the Bill in the Assembly. To my mind the Bill was desired to give the Government of India power to prevent the entry into India of Communist emissaries *in future*, to prevent conspiracy in India to subvert the Government, and to prevent the commission of allied offences, which we find

have been committed by Messrs Spratt and Bradley during the past two years. We have found when a communist emissary has got into trouble in India his place is taken by another emissary e.g. when Allison alias Campbell was arrested Spratt came into his shoes. When Spratt was arrested in September 1926, Bradley appeared to relieve him. The present Bill will render continuity of communist endeavour more difficult, but it contains no provisions for the punishment of offences committed by communist emissaries during their stay in this country. If my point of view is correct the Removal Bill is merely a preventive measure and a weapon for future use.⁵⁷

The Removal from India (or Public Safety) Bill was not considered by the Indian authorities to give them sufficient power. To them, the powers from the Bill could be used immediately against Spratt and Bradley only for deportation without adequate punishment for their offences. The Act would actually enable the Government to deal more satisfactorily with their successors who were most certainly expected to substitute for them in India. The Home Department argued that prosecution must be instituted against Spratt and Bradley for the offences which they had committed under the provisions of the existing Penal Code. That they had committed a severe offence in conspiring against the Government of India was not doubted and the exact nature of these offences were under consideration for possible legal proceedings. The Home Department officials were of the opinion that a successful prosecution of these men and their associates in India was far more preferable "to passing an order of deportation against them", as deportation alone was not really penal and was not "likely to be deterrent in effect on others."⁵⁸ Moreover, unlike the Home Government in England, the Intelligence Branch authorities were equally concerned about the offensive activities of Indian Communist leaders in India as much as they were about Spratt and Bradley. So their report to the Home Department pointed out that:

The question of dealing with Indian Communists will still remain for solution after the removal of Spratt and Bradley. I am of opinion that it will be impossible

to prosecute Indian Communists for conspiracy in connection with the events of the past two years if action against Spratt and Bradley is limited to removal from India to their homes in England. Such action if followed by the prosecution of their associate would be constructed as an act of racial discrimination, with considerable semblance of truth. Suspicion already exists in the minds of a section of the Assembly in this matter and was given voice to during the recent debates.⁵⁹

The real danger to British sovereignty, according to this report was not in the persons of Spratt and Bradley, but what they stood for—their ideas, political convictions and the methods they adopted to achieve them. The actual threat behind Communism was the spectre of Soviet Russia and Bolshevism. The events of 1927 and 1928 had convinced them that the threat was real and imminent. So if the prosecution of Indian Communists for conspiracy became impossible, owing to the removal of the principals, Spratt and Bradley, the Government of India would be forced to "enact further legislation" like the Public Safety Bill in order to "remove Indians from centres of activity and to intern them at their homes, or in selected localities." It was further pointed out in the report that it would also be necessary to consider action "under the Criminal Law Amendment Act (Act XIV of 1908), for existing communist organizations in India are not likely to disappear with the removal of Spratt and Bradley, nor can we expect the conspiracy, organized in Russia and intensified in the past two years, to come to a sudden end with the passage of Removal Bill."⁶⁰

While the Secretary of State wanted the Removal Bill as the main weapon to deal with the threat of Communism in India, the intelligence men were convinced that the Bill alone was not sufficient in this regard. So the Director of the Intelligence Bureau, in his recommendation to the Viceroy, commented:

I regret that I am unable to regard the Removal Bill as a piece of legislation which will be an effective or permanent weapon against outside agitators. It will become much more effective if the present emissaries in India are convicted under the I.P.C. [Indian Penal Code] and sentenced for the offences they have com-

mitted. When they have served their sentence the provisions of the Bill can be most usefully employed against them.⁶¹

As regards the Secretary of State's concern about the possibility of involving British citizens if a conspiracy case was launched, and his worry about its probable repercussions in England, the Intelligence Bureau assured him that there was no intention to indict anyone in England, though it might be necessary to refer to certain prominent members of certain associations and their connection with Communists in India. This would not "necessarily raise the question of tolerance of Communist activities in England and in the party by His Majesty's Government, which appears to be a separate issue."⁶² It was also pointed out that the problem of England could never be compared to the problems of British India and as such the same type of situation in the two countries called for different measures. It was argued

. . . that interference with Communist associations in England is unnecessary so long as members of such associations confine their activity to England, where public opinion is sufficiently strong to prevent any serious menace to society. When the members of such associations join in and assist Russian designs on the Empire the position is materially altered and the closest co-operation between His Majesty's Government in England and the Government of India should be expected in order to put an end to such a conspiracy. . . . There can be little to fear from the consequences of determined action to crush the designs of the Soviet Government against British India. In any case inaction in England is no justification for inaction in India which is fraught with the gravest danger.⁶³

That Lord Irwin was definitely convinced by this reasoning and agreed to take steps in accordance with the Intelligence Bureau's suggestions is indicated in his telegraphing the Secretary of State three days after their report was completed:

Regarding the Conspiracy case, we are aware of general consideration stated in your telegram, and unless the case is a very clear one we have no intention of authorising action. Even so, we might prefer to deal with

Bradley and Spratt under the new powers ; but the difficulty is that the conspiracy case, which would involve a number of Indian leaders whom we want to get rid of, could hardly be launched unless Spratt was included in it, as it would largely be built around Spratt's activities. In any event there is no intention of indicting anyone at present in England.⁶⁴

It was almost certain by this time that a conspiracy case would be launched, the exact nature and extent to depend on the results of legal and police enquiries. Preparations on a large scale were being initiated for this purpose. This is indicated by the fact that on September 28, 1928, the Viceroy informed the Governors of Provinces that "we hope to run a conspiracy case against a considerable number of communists in India including Spratt and Bradley."⁶⁵

Elaborate legal preparations were under way investigating the exact extent of the case, considering evidence, etc. by a large group of lawyers under a senior barrister of Calcutta, Mr. Langford James, from August to December, 1928. Meanwhile the authors of numerous detailed political reports of the period kept a watchful eye on the left-wing activities in India. The events of the period September to December, 1928—the growing trade union movements, the workings of the WPP, the large-scale labour unrests in the big industrial cities of Bombay and Calcutta, the great number of lock-outs and strike throughout India, the growing youth movement in the country and the aggressive tone of a powerful section of the Indian National Congress—all were read by the Indian authorities as a clear sign of dangerous growth of Communism in India.

The secret police report covering the events and developments in the Communist situation in India from September, 1928 to January, 1929 covered minutely the actions of the prominent left-wing leaders and analysed the happenings in major Indian Provinces in this light.⁶⁶ Added concern was felt at the arrival of some noted Communist agents during this period in the persons of J. F. Ryaa, J. W. Johnstone, Lester Hutchinson, Samsul Huda, Gangadhar M. Adhikari, and Shaukat Usmani. All these activities seemed to manifest the violent and dangerous nature of Communism in India and were officially interpreted as a planned

and carefully executed operation from Moscow against the British Government of India. As the political report of the period noted, "the creation of unrest, as a preliminary to the 'workers' revolution' has been the avowed policy of the Communist International not only in India, but in every other country where they have attempted to gain a footing."⁶⁷ It was also believed that contact between the Indian labour movement and foreign Communist organizations had increased considerably during the period, and that foreign agents like J. F. Ryan and J. W. Johnstone were sent by Moscow for definite purposes detrimental to British interests in India.

Another source of anxiety to the Indian Government was the rapid radicalization of a powerful section of the Indian National Congress. The Home Department's report commenting on the subject observed:

The rapidly growing influence of the Communists was reflected in the proceedings of the recent session of the All-India National Congress at Calcutta. More than in any other previous congress, the Calcutta gathering showed that it was anxious to placate the labour extremists. Resolutions condemning the Public Safety Bill and the Trade Disputes Bill were passed, and it was decided that the Congress should take up the organization of the workers and peasants as parts of its future programme of constructive work for non-cooperation. Some communists have secured places in the AICC. Similarly, the communist group in Bombay were remarkably successful in the municipal elections; and in other public bodies throughout the country they are gradually gaining a footing.⁶⁸

All in all, the events of September, 1928 to January, 1929 were considered a great potential threat to the security of British rule in India. Summing up the situation the report recommended:

After the comparative failure of M. N. Roy's organisation to achieve any tangible results in India, the success of the new methods (delegation of Allison, Spratt, Bradley, Johnstone, Ryan etc.) with the consequent upheaval in industrial circles in India, is bound to encourage the Soviet leaders to still further efforts. The

menace of communism to the peace in India is looming larger than ever, and unless the authorities are armed with wider powers to deal with the leaders of the movement in this country (especially those imported from outside), the events of the next year or two may well be fraught with the greatest consequences of the security of the country.⁶⁰

The idea of the Public Safety Bill alone as a sufficient measure to deal with this situation was discarded by the Viceroy by January 1929. His letter to the Provincial Government of Bombay and Calcutta of January 18, 1929, expressed this decision clearly: "We recognize that this measure [re-introduction of the Public Safety Bill in the Assembly], though important in itself, particularly as putting a stop for the future to the marked impetus the Communist movement has received recently from abroad, does not directly touch the existing Communist agitators." Along with the Public Safety Bill and the Trades Disputes Bill the Government was decidedly in favour of taking legal procedures against the prominent leftist leaders of the country. The Viceroy in his above-mentioned letter informed the Governors, "we have, however, at present reasonably good hopes of being able to run a comprehensive conspiracy case against these men. If we could do this, it would in our opinion deal a more severe blow to the Indian Communist movement than anything that could be effected through further special legislation."⁶¹

On January 15, 1929, Sir David Petric, Director of Intelligence Bureau, submitted the preliminary report on the feasibility of launching a conspiracy case. The report was prepared by Mr. R. K. Horton, a senior police official who had been on special duty for several months collecting material for possible legal action.⁶² After examining all the available material on the matter, Mr. Horton was satisfied that enough legal proof existed to establish the presence of a Communist conspiracy to deprive the King of his sovereignty of British India. In his carefully prepared report he outlined the growth of the Communist International since 1919, its proclaimed aim of a world revolution with its clear intention of fomenting a revolution in India—a scheme in which the most important role was played by M. N. Roy till 1924 when his activities were brought to a temporary halt by the

Kanpur Bolshevik Case. Thereafter the Communist International continued its activities in India through the co-operation of Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and other affiliated bodies. Foreign emissaries like George Allison, Philip Spratt, Benjamin Brndley (especially the last two) had succeeded in reviving the Communist activities in India to a remarkable extent.

Horton's report also outlined the methods which the Communist International adopted at the World Congress of 1924 in order to show that these methods were being productively applied in India by Spratt and his associates.

There is little evidence that Spratt and his associate have seriously endeavoured to tamper with the loyalty of the armed forces of the State ; but this apart, it can clearly be proved that they have exactly followed, and are following, the programme and instructions of the Communist International. It can be proved also that in all these activities they have been receiving financial help from the British Communist Party and the Communist International, or organizations affiliated to, or under the control of these bodies. The activities and methods of the present Communist conspirators are almost identical with those that were pronounced to be criminal in the Cawnpore trial.⁷²

Thus the Indian Government was assured that the actions of Spratt and his associates could be proved beyond doubt as part of a conspiracy against the King Emperor. This could be done "on the lines followed in the Cawnpore by the production of letters, money orders, telegrams, newspapers, books, journals, pamphlets and by their public speeches and activities." Horton was confident that sufficient evidence was in existence to establish a strong case of conspiracy as defined in Section 121(A) of the Indian Penal Code against 22 leading Communists, among whom Spratt and Bradley were included.⁷³

This report had its intended effect immediately as the Government showed no further hesitation. Four days after the report was submitted the Viceroy informed the Secretary of State on January 19, 1929, that

The conclusion we have definitely arrived at is that both on grounds of general policy and on practical

considerations we should, in the first place, . . . [launch] a comprehensive conspiracy case against the leading Indian Communists before we consider taking any further legislative powers.

The advantages in successfully launching such a case was also pointed out by the Viceroy:

The existing organisations would be broken up and the more dangerous leaders removed by success in such a case. It would expose by means of a judicial pronouncement, which would not be questioned, the real aims and the methods of the Communists. Thereafter it would possibly enable us to proceed to proclaim certain communist associations, such as the Workers' and Peasants' Parties, under the Criminal Law Amendment Act as unlawful associations on the authority of the findings of the Court. In our view it would indeed deal the whole communist movement a more serious blow than any that could be expected from the taking of new special powers.

The probable time for launching the case was also discussed: Steps are now about to be taken to obtain the best possible legal opinion, on the material collected by the Special Officer, which is very voluminous, and we do not anticipate that we shall have a final legal opinion till about the middle of March. If an assurance of success is given by this opinion, we should then proceed to launch the case as early as possible probably about the beginning of April. The trial would take many months and would be costly, but in comparison with the advantages of success the time and money would be of little account. When once a case has been launched, the main activities of the Communists would, we think, be paralysed, for the number of Communist leaders in India is not large, and all those of any account would be included in the case.⁷⁴

The Viceroy, however, assured the Secretary of State that there was no intention "to indict anyone in England though reference to the activities of Communists in England will be important and

inevitable." He expected to receive "all reasonable assistance from authorities in England", if the case was instituted.⁷³

Even though the Indian authorities were so convinced about the advantages of proceeding with the conspiracy case, the Home Government were much less enthusiastic about it. In fact, the Secretary of State was very sceptical and still believed that the Public Safety Bill should be the only measure with which the Indian Government should tackle the issue, especially in dealing with Spratt and Bradley, who were British citizens. In his reply of February 21, 1929, to the Viceroy's telegram the Secretary of State made this difference in opinion quite clear. First, as the Viceroy had told him the case would not be initiated soon, he reasoned that if the lawyers finally advised that prosecution might not be worthwhile much valuable time would have been wasted. So he suggested:

In my opinion the chief danger lies in the presence in India of the two British organisers Spratt and Bradley and perhaps also Ryan and I cannot help feeling that the sooner they are removed the better. If they are dealt with under the Public Safety Bill when passed, a heavy blow would be dealt to the organisation built up by them and might well be followed up by proceedings against the Indian Communist leaders for sedition etc., whether comprehensively or individually as opportunities offered.⁷⁴

Furthermore, he was afraid of the possible repercussions of such drastic measures in England. Especially with the next general election due in a few months he wanted to avoid any severe criticism from the Opposition. Moreover, as already requested by the Director of Intelligence Bureau and the Viceroy, a certain measure of assistance was essential from the Home Government in acquiring evidence for the case, the nature of which might involve searches and police investigations in England involving British citizens. He apprehended difficulties in the matter.

As regards the authorities in this country we can no doubt count upon a certain amount of assistance but you will realise that the present situation with general election imminent is particularly unfavourable. Particular points raised by DIB in letter to IPI of December

24th, were referred to the Home Office who definitely stated that both legal and political objections to the proposal are insuperable (copy of Home Office opinion was sent to the DIB by the mail of February 7th). I do not know to what extent documents for which it was proposed to search are essential to your case. Another minor difficulty is the probability that witnesses sent out from here will be detained for several weeks in the hot weather.⁷⁷

But in spite of these differences of opinion, the Secretary of State was willing to defer to the Indian Government's judgment in the matter.

Meanwhile, the legal opinion was given by Mr. Langford James that the government had a cast-iron case and should therefore proceed with the conspiracy trial. He argued that

. . . the case against the present accused persons is that they being Communists pledged to forward the aims of the Communist International—and are carrying out the plan of campaign outlined by that body: in effect it is said that they are practical and active Bolsheviks steadily working for the overthrow of the King-Emperor and the setting up of the domination of Moscow. In my opinion the evidence available (e.g. intercepted correspondence, publications, speeches, activities, the source from which the money comes) amply proves that case. I also consider that the complicity of each of the accused in the conspiracy can be satisfactorily proved.⁷⁸

Selection of Meerut as the Venue of the Trial

The next point of contention between the Indian Government and the Home Office was with respect to the venue of the proposed trial. The Home Department (Political) in India as well as the legal opinion wanted the case to be tried without the jury and suggested Meerut as the possible place for trial. However, once again the Secretary of State was doubtful about the wisdom of such a decision. The question of the venue was a very important point, in the opinion of the Home Department,

as they pointed out that though they had a very formidable case against the Communist conspirators, even cast-iron cases were subject to jury's whims, and "however good the case, there could be no assurance that a jury would convict." So it was stated emphatically that "we cannot put the case into Court unless we are convinced that it would result in conviction." The two main centres of Communist netivity in India were Bombay and Calcutta, cities in which a case of conspiracy would have to be tried by a High Court Bench with a jury. Neither Langford James nor the Home Department was prepared to run this risk. They therefore suggested that the case be instituted in Meerut, a small town in the United Provinces (U.P.)—not far from Delhi. The choice of Meerut as the venue was justified on the following grounds:

(i) with the present dangerous atmosphere prevailing among the labouring population both in Bombay and Calcutta is clearly undesirable to have the trial at either of these places.

(ii) There is a branch of the Workers' and Peasants' Party at Meerut. The place has been visited by Spratt and other important members of the conspiracies, and though it is not at the moment a particularly netive centre of the conspiracy, it is clear that acts in furtherance of the conspiracy have been performed there.

(iii) It is a convenient central place for a trial, which will include accused and witnesses from all parts of India (Bombay, Bengal, Punjab, and U.P.). It is also very conveniently situated for the Government of India, who are really primarily responsible for the trial.⁷⁰

Probable objections were anticipated on behalf of the accused, especially the two Englishmen Spratt and Bradley, who might protest that they were being deprived of the privilege of being tried by a jury in Meerut, which they would enjoy at Calcutta or Bombay. However, the Government was prepared with convincing answer to explain the situation as the Viceroy informed the Secretary of State on February 27, 1929:

. . . trial by jury of case under Chapter VI of Indian Penal Code is exceptional, not normal. There is now no distinction in regard to trial by jury between Europeans

and Indians. Therefore normal procedure for trying Europeans on such charge in India is that he should be tried with the aid of assessors. Only privilege Europeans can claim is that assessors should be European—see Section 284-A C.P.C. On these grounds Spratt and Bradley could under Section 285-A claim separate trials for Indians, but not trial by jury. As European assessors would be no advantage to them, we think it improbable they will make any such claim.⁶⁰

When the matter was referred to the Executive Council it was only the Finance Minister, Sir George Schuster, who recorded even a mild protest. He regretted the necessity of anything which appeared like manoeuvring in this matter but agreed to the proposal being put up to the Secretary of State.⁶¹

So the concurrence of the Home Government in the matter of selecting the venue of the proposed trial as Meerut, was sought by the Viceroy. It was pointed out by him that recognized rule of law in England and India was that venue in a conspiracy case might be in any place in which overt acts were carried out by any of the conspirators and also that in criminal cases the choice of venue lay with the prosecution and not with the plaintiff as is usually the practice in a civil case. The Viceroy and his staff emphatically pointed out that if trial by jury were not avoided the defence might take a political line in which case the chances were that a jury would acquit. So if the Secretary of State could not agree to Meerut as the venue, the case would have to be dropped and the Indian Government deprived of what they were convinced was, in the circumstances, much the most effective weapon against Communism. As for the suggestion that the two Englishmen be deported without trial, the Viceroy was strongly opposed to it. He wrote:

It might be considered that another course was open to us, namely to proceed with the trial at Meerut of the Indian Communists—in which case questions about a jury are not likely to be raised and if raised would be of little importance—and to disrupt [the successful activities of] Spratt and Bradley under Public Safety Bill powers. Objections to this is that Spratt is the prime mover in conspiracy. It would be a clear failure of

- justice if he were merely removed from the country just when the less important conspirators were being put on their trial on most serious charges. It would be difficult to refute the accusation that we were discriminating in favour of Europeans.⁸²

The Secretary of State still had certain misgivings concerning the trial of two Englishmen without a jury and the possible reactions it might give rise to in England. In response to the Viceroy's plea he wrote:

I realise, of course, that trial by jury is impossible but I am seriously concerned at proposal, of feeling which will almost certainly be created here if it appears or can be represented that a place with which neither Spratt nor Bradley has been connected has been selected for trial solely for the purpose of depriving the two Englishmen of so cherished a right. It will be said that no English visitor to India will be safe; attention will be called to loss of rights which European British subjects suffered in 1923 by amendment of Code of Criminal Procedure and which has hitherto escaped much notice here, and it may be that there will also be revival of agitation in general extension of trial by jury. I foresee awkward questions in Parliament and possibility of agitation which is undesirable on the eve of the general elections.⁸³

However, this did not change the Viceroy's decision, and he informed the Secretary of State on March 10, 1929, of his confidence that the course proposed by his Government was the right one.

As regards place selected for trial, Meerut was visited by Spratt in company with important Indian Communists. They held a public meeting and founded the Workers' and Peasants' Party of U.P. on basis of C.I. programme. There are four centres of the Workers' and Peasants' Party in the U.P., and party is actively functioning. Spratt has himself written saying he would like to make Meerut his headquarters. Bradley has also paid visit to Cawnpore, where he associated with some of those who were convicted in the Cawnpore Conspiracy

Case of 1924. The legal position is we are advised, unassailable, . . .⁸⁴

In regard to the criticism that Spratt and Bradley were being deprived of cherished right of trial by jury, the Viceroy pointed out that the offence they were charged with was not of a personal or individual nature, but was concerning their membership of a wide-spread plot in India and outside, and hence the place of trial could not reasonably be made to depend on what might suit two out of a large number of accused. That Meerut was not an arbitrary choice was reasserted by showing that of the persons to be arrested seven were from U.P. whose activities at one time or another had been carried out at Meerut. In answer to the Secretary of State's enquiry whether the inclusion of Spratt and Bradley in trial was absolutely essential to securing the conviction of the Indians, the Viceroy was positively certain.

Spratt in particular is the central figure of the conspiracy, and if he was omitted the case would appear so obviously incomplete that it might well form the subject of judicial as well as public comment, to which there could be no answer. Further absence of Spratt and Bradley might seriously affect question of sentences, as it would be argued that Govt. attached so little importance to case that it was content to let the principal conspirator escape untouched. Apart from above considerations which appear to me decisive, inclusion of these two would naturally aid Crown in proving that conspiracy has been promoted by and in pursuance of designs of Communist International, which is the essence of the case.⁸⁵

Thereafter, the Secretary of State agreed not to press his objections any further and on March 11 gave his approval to the conspiracy trial.⁸⁶

Arrests of the Accused

On 14th March the Viceroy's Council sanctioned the arrest of thirty-one leftist leaders with the charge of having "entered into a conspiracy to deprive the King of the sovereignty of British India, and having thereby committed an offence punish-

able under Section 121-A of I.P.C." The Council, under the provisions of Section 196 of Criminal Penal Code, 1898, ordered Mr. M. A. Horton, Officer on Special Duty, under the Director, Intelligence Bureau, Home Department, to file a complaint against those thirty-one persons in the Court of the District Magistrate at Meerut.*7

The thirty-one persons accused of conspiracy represented the leadership of the working class movement of India. They were:

1. *Phillip Spratt*: former Executive member of the Trade Union Congress, prominent member of the CPI, the WPP and the Girni Kamgar Union (GKU).
2. *Benjamin Francis Bradley*: former member of the London District Committee of the Amalgamated Engineering Union in Britain; Executive member of the G.I.P. Railwaymen's Union and of the GKU; Vice President of the All-India Railwaymen's Federation; Treasurer of the Joint Strike Committee in the Bombay textile strike; prominent member of the CPI and the WPP.
3. *Ajodhya Prasad*: active member of the Bengal WPP.
4. *Shaikat Usmani*: sentenced in the Kanpur trial; Editor of a Urdu working-class paper in Bombay and a newly elected member of the Comintern Presidium.
5. *Puran Chand Joshi*: Secretary of the U.P. and Delhi WPP.
6. *Gauri Shankar*: Executive Committee member of the U.P. WPP.
7. *Lakshman Rao Kadani*: organisor of the Municipal Workers' Union at Jhansi.
8. *Dr. Viswanath Mukharji*: President of the U.P. WPP.
9. *Chowdhury Dharamvir Singh, M.L.C.*: Vice-President, WPP, Meerut.
10. *Dharani K. Goswami*: Assistant Secretary of the Bengal WPP and a prominent trade unionist.
11. *Shib Nath Bannerjee*: President of the Bengal Jute Workers' Union, previously sentenced to one year in connection with the Kharagpur Railway strike.
12. *Gopal Basak*: President of the Socialist Youth Conference in 1928.

13. *Muzaffar Ahmad*: Vice-President of the AITUC ; Secretary of the Bengal WPP ; sentenced in the Kanpur trial.
14. *Samsul Huda*: Secretary of the Bengal Transport Workers' Union.
15. *Kishorilal Ghosh*: Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Federation of Trade Unions.
16. *Gopendra Chakravarty*: official of the Eastern Railway Union ; previously sentenced to one and a half years in connection with the Kharagpur Railway strike.
17. *Radha Raman Mitra*: Secretary of the Bengal Jute Workers' Union.
18. *Sripad Amrit Dange*: Assistant Secretary of the AITUC ; formerly sentenced in the Kanpur trial ; General Secretary of the GKU ; prominent member of the CPI and the WPP.
19. *Sachidanand Vishnu Ghate*: Assistant Secretary of the AITUC (1927) and Vice-President of the Bombay Municipal Workers' Union ; prominent member of the CPI and the WPP.
20. *S. H. Jhabwalla*: Organising Secretary of the All-India Railwaymen's Federation ; former Vice-President of the GKU.
21. *Dhondi Raj Thengdi*: Ex-President and Executive member of the AITUC ; member of the AICC.
22. *Kashab Nilkant Joglekar*: Organising Secretary of the G.I.P. Railwaymen's Union ; member of the AICC.
23. *Shantaram Savlaram Mirajkar*: Assistant Secretary of the GKU.
24. *Raghunath Shivram Ninbkar*: Secretary of the Bombay Trades Council and of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee ; General Secretary of the All-India WPP ; member of the AICC.
25. *Gangadhar Moreswar Adhikari*, Ph.D.: joined both the Bombay WPP and the CPI after returning to India from Germany in December, 1928 ; contributor to the Bombay socialist paper *The Spark*.
26. *Motiram Gajanan Desai*: Editor of the Bombay socialist journal *The Spark*.

27. *Arjun Atmaram Alve*: President of the GKU ; a prominent member of the CPI and the WPP.
28. *Govind Ramchandra Kasle*: important official of the GKU.
29. *Sohan Singh Josh*: President of the All-India Workers' and Peasants' Conference and an important member of the Punjab Kirti Kisan Party.
30. *M. A. Majid*: left India in 1920 with the Khilafat movement ; visited Russia and was imprisoned on return. Secretary of the Kirti Kisan (Peasants) Party, Punjab ; important member of the All-India Youth League.
31. *Kedar Nath Sehgal*: President of the Punjab Congress Committee and Financial Secretary of the Punjab Provincial Congress Committee ; member of the All-India Youth League.⁸⁸

On March 20, 1929, large scale arrests were carried out simultaneously in half a dozen different towns. In some cases prolonged house searches were made. All the prisoners were taken to the inland town of Meerut. Of the thirty-one accused, thirteen came from Bombay, ten from Bengal, five from the United Provinces and three from the Punjab.⁸⁹

In June the number of defendants was increased to thirty-two with the arrest of Lester Hutchinson, an English journalist who arrived in India in September, 1928. He was the editor of a Bombay labour journal *The New Spark*⁹⁰ and also the Vice-President of the GKU. The Home Department investigated him closely and decided, they had enough evidence to prosecute him with the other accused in the Meerut Conspiracy Case. The Viceroy informed the Secretary of State on June 8, 1929:

As a result of the examination of the evidence against Hutchinson it is found that there is a very strong case against him, and that if he is included as an accused in the Meerut Case it will be of material benefit to the prosecution of the other accused. To proceed against him under the Public Safety Ordinance may it is thought be reasonably criticized as prejudging the Meerut trial. Governor-General-in-Council has therefore sanctioned prosecution of Hutchinson as an accused in the Meerut Conspiracy Case.⁹¹

A warrant was also issued for the arrest of Amir Haidar Khan who was described as a "secret agent of communications between India and Moscow,"⁹² and an active member of the CPI, but he absconded before he could be brought to trial.

Discussion

In the light of the events discussed above, a few pertinent questions regarding British official policy with respect to the left-wing politics of India during the period of January, 1928, to March, 1929, might be asked at this point.

The period under review witnessed the increasing concern on the part of the British Government with countering the growing militancy of the left-wing activists in India. Thus in answer to the question as to why did the British Government deem it necessary to undertake a series of measures to restrain Communism in India during 1928-29, the following probable reasons might be enumerated:

First, "Communism" in British official view represented Soviet Russia's threat to the British Empire, particularly to British rule in India. The Communist International was believed to have been conducting and directing a movement to achieve this end with the help of their Indian converts.

Secondly, the chief objectives of the Communists were to infiltrate into and control the Indian National Congress, the labour movement, the youth organization, and to exploit the anti-British sentiment of the Indians in general. These objectives were to be attained through the trade unions, the Workers' and Peasants' parties, and by means of strikes, demonstrations and propaganda work. The political events of 1928-29 seemed to indicate that the Communists did achieve a degree of success in the pursuit of their aims following their planned course of action.

Third, the strike waves of 1928 and early 1929 were creating an acute economic problem for the Government.

Fourth, the private capitalists of India who suffered due to the increased activities of the Communists in the trade union movement, exerted pressure upon the Government to undertake suitable actions to deal with the situation.⁹³

Fifth, a marked increase in terrorist activities in India during

1928 and early 1929 added more violence to the already turbulent political atmosphere engendered by the Communists.⁶⁴

Finally, the threat of another imminent countrywide Non-co-operation movement under the aegis of the Indian National Congress made the issue even more crucial for the Government.

This was the political background, as the officials viewed it, against which the Government of India was prompted to embark upon a series of measures to render a crushing blow to Communism in India. It was concluded that sufficient indications were present in the situation of 1928-29 which pointed to the potential threat inherent in the young but vigorously growing Communist movement in India and it was also felt in the official circles that if proper steps were not taken immediately the threat would grow ultimately to destroy British sovereignty in India.

Among the several measures deliberated in this connection, certainly the most important and serious one, as later events proved, was the decision to institute a large scale Conspiracy Trial against thirty-one (later increased to thirty-two) outstanding left-wing leaders in India, including three British citizens. As noted earlier, the decision was not made at once and two questions were especially significant: the selection of the time for launching the case and the selection of the venue for the trial.

Although the idea of launching the trial was conceived as early as September, 1928, the actual arrests did not take place till March 20, 1929. A proper question therefore might be asked as to why the case was launched at that particular time? Why not before or after? Apparently there were several factors which were jointly responsible for the choice of the time when the arrests did take place.

The special police reports on left-wing political situation in India covering the period of December, 1928 to March, 1929, convinced the Government that if legal actions were to be taken, they must not be delayed.⁶⁵ Growing unrest in the labour front, increasing industrial disputes and the seriousness of the forthcoming civil disobedience movement together with pressures for action from the Provincial Governors and Indian businessmen—all precluded the possibility of the case being launched any later than it possibly could be. The reasons why the arrests were not

made before March 20, 1929, can be attributed to two probable factors, viz.:

(1) Even though the Home Department, Government of India, was thinking positively in terms of a trial since September, 1928, the prosecuting attorneys and the Government's special investigators needed time to evaluate the existing evidence in order to ascertain definitively whether a legal case was feasible or not. On January 15, 1929, Sir David Petrie, Director of Intelligence Bureau, submitted the preliminary report on the possibility of starting a conspiracy case assuring the Viceroy that sufficient evidence was in existence to proceed with the case. However, the unambiguous legal opinion on the matter was not rendered till March 13, 1929.¹⁶

(2) Although the Government of India was convinced about the advisability of proceeding with the conspiracy case, a considerable amount of time elapsed before the Secretary of State was persuaded to agree that this was a proper course of action to be undertaken with regard to the Communist situation in India.¹⁷ So it was not before March 12, 1929, that the Delhi office received the formal approval of the Secretary of State to go ahead with the case. Thereafter, on March 14, 1929, the Viceroy's Council endorsed the sanction order for the arrest of thirty-one leftist leaders and after suitable preparations were made, the order was effected on March 20, 1929.

There were some other circumstantial factors which might have had some influence upon the decision as to when the case was to be launched.

First, the Public Safety Bill which was defeated by the united nationalist effort in the Legislative Assembly, acquired a special significance in the public eye as the subject of a nationalist victory over the Government. The Bill, as noted before, had provoked considerable public and nationalist interest on the Communist question. The Government announced its intention of re-introducing the Bill at the next session of the Assembly and both sides settled down to a campaign of propaganda for and against the Bill. Lester Hutchinson writing about the time described the prevalent atmosphere as:

The "Communist Menace" became the obsession of the pro-Government Press ; a menace of which the existence

was vigorously denied by the nationalist organs. Interest in the Public Safety Bill . . . mounted high with the approach of the next session of the Legislative Assembly ; and protest meetings against the Bill were held in every political centre throughout the country.⁹⁸

The Bill was set for discussion on March 21, 1929, and on March 20, the large scale arrests took place. Thus the Government decided to strike before risking another possible defeat in the Assembly debate. Another possible reason why the Government decided to launch the case on the eve of the scheduled date when the Public Safety Bill was to be reconsidered in the Assembly might have been to impress upon the people and the opposition the gravity and reality of the Bolshevik menace.

Second, the findings of the Fawcett Mill Strike Inquiry Committee were about to be released when the Government decided to arrest the leftist leaders. It was probably not a coincidence that just three days after the Meerut arrests, on March 23, 1929, the Fawcett Committee published its report, which was generally unfavourable to the workers' demands and the trade unions. The working class organizations in Bombay were openly preparing to strike should the findings of the Fawcett Committee be unfavourable. It is not highly improbable, therefore, to surmise that the Government knew the nature and contents of the forthcoming report, had apprehended another wave of strikes and demonstrations in Bombay, and had decided to render the protest movement ineffective by arresting most of its experienced and able leadership before the publication of the report.⁹⁹

Third, the Government was apprehending a big strike in the country on May 1, 1929. Thus the Chief Crown Prosecutor, Mr. Langford James in the course of his opening address later in the trial held that the immediate objective of all the vigorous Communist activity in India was to bring a general strike on an extensive scale on the First of May, 1929.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, he declared, the Indian Communists were engaged in energetic planning upon this ambitious task when they were arrested in March of that year.¹⁰¹

Finally, the general election in England was to have taken place in May, 1929. The Conservative Government in power was sceptical about the thought that if the Labour Party came to

power they might not carry out prosecution against trade union and labour leaders of India. However, according to the British judiciary system, once a trial gets underway, no change in the political structure of the Government could stop it from running its full course. This might possibly indicate why the case was launched in such a hurry, i.e., within a week from the date that the Secretary of State gave his consent on the issue. It may be noted here that a relatively recent Indian Communist explanation of the Meerut Conspiracy Case has held that

general elections to [the British] parliament were scheduled to take place in May, 1929. The March, 1929 arrests in India as well as the opening of the political trial was designed by the Conservative Government of Baldwin to play up the 'Communist danger' which was allegedly threatening the entire capitalist world. It was intended to use the trial for preparing the ideological ground for a new anti-Soviet intervention.¹⁰²

With regard to the question about the selection of the venue for the trial, there were a number of strong arguments to justify the choice of Meerut.

(1) The secret official reports and correspondences on the issue make it very clear that Meerut was chosen to deny the accused the privilege of a jury trial. A Conspiracy Case under Section 121-A of the Indian Penal Code, would ordinarily have been held in either Bombay or Calcutta since most of the accused had hailed from these two cities and also since most of their alleged conspiratorial activities were conducted there. But under the British Indian judicial system, a case of conspiracy in either Bombay or Calcutta had to be tried by a High Court Bench with a jury. It was strongly believed by both the Home Department and the Chief Crown Prosecutor that a trial by jury would have involved the risk that a jury might not have convicted the accused.¹⁰³

(2) Bombay and Calcutta, as possible venues of the trial were also discarded because they were too much in the centre of the political scene of India. These were the strongholds of the Communists, and politically also the atmosphere in these two big metropolitan cities were much more charged with anti-British sentiments than elsewhere in the country. So the Government was

naturally reluctant to conduct a trial of thirty-two labour leaders in the midst of an already restive labour population, an action which would most certainly have been a very unpopular act.¹⁰⁴

(3) Since both Bombay and Calcutta were rejected as possible venues of the trial, Meerut was suggested as the alternative as it was the scene of some minor left-wing activities outside Bombay and Calcutta during the period. Moreover, Meerut being centrally located, was very conveniently situated for the Government of India.

(4) Although Meerut was geographically more centrally located, it was remote from the big cities like Bombay and Calcutta. Thus lack of proper communications and access was expected to seclude the accused from being in constant touch with their organizations and centers of activities.

Meerut was thus not a random selection on the part of the Government. In fact, after a lot of planning and considerations, it was selected as an ideal place for a trial satisfying most of the Government's requirements. The Government of India felt so strongly that this was just the right place for the trial that the Home Secretary wanted to be assured by the Viceroy that he would get the Secretary of State's permission to launch the trial at Meerut otherwise the case should not be considered at all.¹⁰⁵

Thus after the decisions were made as to the proper time and place for the trial, the actual arrests were carried out on March 20, 1929, and one of the longest and most elaborate trials in Indian history opened. The launching of the Meerut Conspiracy Case thus saw the culmination of British Government's efforts to fight the rising tide of Communism in India.

CHAPTER III

Reactions to the Meerut Arrests: Left-Wing and Nationalist Developments in India

Immediate Effects

ON the early morning of March 20, 1929, the arrests of thirty-one labour leaders were carried out simultaneously in Bombay, Calcutta, Allahabad, Delhi, Lahore, Meerut and other places. The arrests were followed by massive house searches conducted all over India by the police. These included the offices of various trade unions, labour organizations, notable left-wing leaders, the Free Press of India and several Indian newspapers, as well as the Youth League offices in Bombay, Calcutta and Allahabad.¹ Several cart-loads of books, papers, letters, etc. were seized. Soon thereafter the accused were taken to Meerut, where they awaited the beginning of their trial.

It was a very sudden move on the part of the Government and the news of the forthcoming arrests was kept a very well-guarded secret. In anticipation of demonstrations and violence in the wake of the arrests a large number of British and Indian infantry and armed police were mobilized in Bombay and Calcutta as a precautionary measure.² The Bombay authorities were particularly alarmed as the largest number of arrests (fourteen) and searches were carried out in that city, and the Bombay Government informed the Home Department, New Delhi, on March 20:

Government of Bombay consider it possible that serious trouble may arise amongst Mill hands when arrest of Communist leaders under Meerut Magistrate's warrant become known. Therefore as a precautionary measure military assistance was asked for and military

pickets have been stationed in Bombay city from 6 A.M. this morning. Warwickshire Regiment one company, Royal Artillery 50 rifles, Jats one company, Hyderabad Regiment 3 platoons.³

A number of magistrates were also notified and alerted for possible arrests and legal actions. The emphasis on secrecy was apparent as not even the magistrates or the armed police force who were already had any inkling of what was coming.⁴

The news of the arrest of the Communist and labour leaders engendered tremendous excitement throughout India, especially in Bombay. There, on March 21, workers in fourteen textile mills suspended work in protest against the arrest of the top leaders of the GKU. Altogether 25,000 mill hands were affected.⁵ Protest meetings were also held at Calcutta, Delhi and other place throughout India condemning the Government for this particular policy of repression directed against the trade union movement.⁶ At Allahabad, on March 21, a huge student demonstration took place protesting the arrests, especially sympathizing with P. C. Joshi, an Allahabad law student and the secretary of the U.P. Workers' and Peasants' party, who was among the thirty-one arrested the day before.⁷

On March 22, about 5,000 railway workers belonging to the Communist-controlled GIP Railwaymen's Union staged a meeting in Bombay to voice their indignation at the massive arrests of Indian labour leaders and particularly that of Jhabwalla, the Union's General Secretary. After the meeting the workers took out a procession of protest which was forcibly stopped by the police, resulting in clashes and a number of injuries.⁸

A special meeting of the All-India Youth League was called on March 22 at Allahabad, and Jawaharlal Nehru presided over it. Five hundred new members were enrolled in the Youth League at this meeting and the executive committee of the League was authorized to take steps for the defence of P. C. Joshi. A resolution passed at this meeting strongly condemned the "campaign the Government has inaugurated all over the country to crush the Labour and Youth movement." The meeting also expressed the League's sympathies with those who had been arrested and had suffered house searches, assuring them of the League's

solidarity with them in "facing the attack of the Government."⁹

Several thousand people attended a protest meeting at Calcutta on the same date. Notable nationalist leaders spoke against the Government action. That the real motive behind this move on the part of the Government was to kill the labour movement in its very infancy and thus to cripple the national struggle for *swaraj* was the argument made in most of the speeches made at the meeting.¹⁰ Similar public meetings were held to protest the arrests at other parts of the country as well.¹¹

The leaders of the Indian National Congress party in the Legislative Assembly on learning of these arrests immediately moved an adjournment of the House on March 21 to discuss the matter which was described as "of urgent public importance." The President of the Assembly allowed the motion but the Viceroy intervened and disallowed it. The Government took up the position that as the matter was *sub judice* it could not be discussed in the House. Similar motions for adjournment were made in Bengal and several other provincial Legislative Councils. They were also allowed by the Presidents but disallowed by the Governors.¹² On March 21, in the Assembly, replying to a short notice question of Pandit Motilal Nehru, Mr. Crerar, Home Member, Government of India, made a comprehensive statement on the subject of arrests and searches. He said that detailed investigation by the Government Intelligence Bureau had shown that the chief objective of the Communist International in Russia was "the complete paralysis and overthrow of the existing Government" in India by means of "general strike and armed uprising", and that the Government has evidence to show that the accused were planning to carry out these objectives in India. Mr. Horton asserted that the accused had "conspired with each other and other persons, known, within or without British India, to deprive the King-Emperor of his sovereignty over British India." They had done so by following "the programme and the plan of campaign outlined and ordained by the Communist International."¹³

Reactions Abroad

(i) In Great Britain :

The large scale arrests of thirty-one labour leaders in India including two British citizens, ignited immediate reaction in England. A series of questions with regard to the arrests was asked in the House of Commons on March 21. The Earl of Winterton, Under-secretary for India, declined to answer a labour inquiry as to whether the arrests of thirty-one alleged Communists in India were carried out at the instigation of the British Government. In answer to the demand of Mr. Thurtle (Labourite) that a statement should be made about these arrests, Earl Winterton replied that "the action was taken with the full assent of the Secretary of State for India (Lord Peel)." He also said "the men were arrested and charged by appropriate authorities with conspiring to deprive the King of sovereignty in British India. They will be accorded a public trial." He refused to go into further details on the plea that the matter was under *sub judice*.¹⁴

Again on March 25, a number of questions were raised in the House of Commons with respect to the Meerut arrests in India. Commander Kenworthy asked whether Earl Winterton was quite sure that under the cover of arrests of plotters against the King, *bona fide* trade union officials had not been arrested. The Under-secretary assured the House that the arrests were not made because the accused were trade union officials but because they were conspirators and it mattered little whether they were trade unionists or not.¹⁵ On March 28, the issue was once again taken up by Mr. Shaklatvala, who raised the question as to why Meerut was selected as the venue of the trial when most of the defendants hailed from Bombay and Calcutta. The Under-secretary refused to make any statement on the issue.¹⁶

Outside the Parliament, several labour leaders voiced their opposition to the arrests. Apart from the Communists, the non-Communist but leftist Independent Labour Party of Britain was bitterly critical of the arrest of the Indian radical, and evinced considerable sympathy for them. Mr. Fenner Brockway, the Independent Labour Party member, speaking at Sheffield on March 24 strongly criticized the arrests of the leaders of the Indian

trade union and youth movements. He said that while some of the accused were avowedly Communists, some of them were not. He noted that "a struggle was proceeding in the Indian national movement between Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent philosophy and the revolutionary sects with their belief in force. The attitude of the British authority was playing into the latter's hands."¹⁷

The Youth Guild of the British Independent Labour Party unanimously passed a resolution protesting strongly against the policy pursued by the Indian Government of arresting leaders of the Indian Youth League. The resolution further demanded immediate release of those arrested on the principle that "to prevent the present disturbances in India, arising purely out of political and economic subjection of Indian people, is to regard justice rather than oppression as the only safe way of meeting the Indian problem."¹⁸

Mr. H. N. Brailsford, a British journalist and a member of the British Independent Labour Party, who visited India during 1930, was sharply critical of the Meerut trial and commented: "in short, the Meerut Trial is but an exceptionally gross instance of an official attitude towards labour which is normally and habitually suspicious and hostile."¹⁹

Mr. R. Bridgman, Secretary, British section of the League Against Imperialism, sent a cable dated March 22 to Jawaharlal Nehru which started:

The British section of the League Executive was deeply shocked at the Indian situation. The League met specially yesterday. We hope you will telegraph a full statement of facts to the British Trade Union Congress and invoke its aid to protect the Trade Union movement. Please also keep us informed of the new developments bearing in mind the probable attempt of the Government to enlist the sympathy of the Indian capitalists against the Trade Union movement.²⁰

However, the British Labour Party as well as the British Trade Union Congress later condoned the arrests.²¹ Though the arrests were made while a Conservative Government was in office, the trial began and ran its course under a Labour Government which came to power in May, 1929. Mr. Wedgwood Benn, the new Secretary of State for India, in a statement to the House of

Commons in July, 1929, made it clear that the new Labour Government in England undertook the full responsibility of the Meerut trial.²²

In answer to an appeal of the Indian Trade Union Congress, Sir Walter Citrine, Secretary of the General Council of the British Trade Union Congress, wrote on October 1, 1929, "the trial should be expedited as quickly as possible. The offence with which the accused are charged is a political offence and one which in the opinion of the General Council does not directly affect the Indian trade union movement as such."²³

When the question was raised again at the Annual Conference of the Labour Party at Brighton in October, 1929, Dr. Drummond Shiels, speaking on behalf of Mr. Wedgwood Benn said:

All the Meerut prisoners, with one exception, were arrested in March last, before the Labour Government came into office, although we accept full responsibility for their present position. The main charge made against us this afternoon, and also in various publications is that these Meerut prisoners are there because they are Labour Leaders or Trade Union Leaders. That is not the case! They are charged, not with being agitators, nor even with being Communists, but with engaging in a conspiracy to change the Government of India by physical and armed force, and with being financed by bodies outside of India for that purpose. . . . I would also like to point out that this trial is taking place under the ordinary law, and not under the extra and special regulations which have been so often criticized by Labour Members in the House of Commons. We have also had complaints about the fact of bail not being given, about the place of the trial, and about trial by jury, but I would like to say that we have gone very carefully into all these questions, and we believe that the procedure which has been adopted is justified and is not unfair to the accused.²⁴

The Meerut arrests and the long trial which followed provoked bitter reaction not only among the left-wing opinions of Britain, but indignant statements were issued by such international cele-

brities as the Archbishop of York, Mr. H. G. Wells, Professor Einstein, Romain Rolland, Professor Harold Laski and Mr. R. H. Tawney.²⁵ In a joint letter to the editor of *Manchester Guardian*, H. G. Wells, H. J. Laski, R. H. Tawney and Walter Walsh expressed their indignation at the arrests and remarked that "a large number of persons charged were officials of a trade union which took part in a bitter strike in Bombay in 1928, and it has been suggested that this is merely a strike breaking prosecution." They also criticized the Government's decision to hold the trial at Meerut thereby depriving the accused of the privilege of a trial by jury.²⁶

In a leading article, the *Manchester Guardian* of December 9, 1929, severely attacked the Government's policy with regard to the arrests and the trial of the thirty-one accused at Meerut. The paper noted wryly:

Was the British Empire really so weak that it was necessary to indict on the charge of conspiracy a few youths alleged to have corresponded in invisible ink and to have sent each other Communist pamphlets under the title of hymn-books and Bibles. . . . The charge against the Meerut prisoners, as set forth in the speech of the prosecuting counsel, was in itself an affront to the usages of British justice. Mr. Langford James' prosecuting speech . . . did not instance specific acts of sedition. He relied entirely upon a general charge of conspiracy, arguing that it is part of the thesis of Communism to overthrow the State by violence—a fact which no Communist denies and which needs no proof—and that such organisations as the Third International, the Pan-Pacific Trade Union, and the League Against Imperialism are in fact part of the Communist organisation and directed from Moscow. From this it is argued that anyone in anyway connected with Communism is party to a seditious conspiracy, whether or not the person charged can actually be proved to have ever contemplated and actions likely to lead to violence or intended to lead to sedition. This is a far-reaching contention the dangerous implications of which have been excellently pointed out by Mr. Wedgwood

Benn himself. If to aim at depriving the King Emperor of his sovereignty is in itself a crime, then all active republicans are criminals. . . .²⁷

The Archbishop of York wrote to the Secretary of State for India on December 12, questioning the efficiency and impartiality of British justice and expressing doubts about the wisdom of the Government in launching the Meerut trial.²⁸ Romain Rolland termed these arrests and the trial a direct and savage attack on the part of the Government "to exterminate the movement of the Indian workers."²⁹

(ii) *Soviet Reactions:*

The Meerut arrests naturally provoked very sharp criticism from Soviet Russia. On March 28, 1929, the Presidium of the Communist International which was meeting at Riga issued an anti-British proclamation in connection with the Indian masses.³⁰

Moscow was evidently furious at this sudden attack on the promising Communist movement in India. Russian feelings were reflected in an unusually violent manifesto from the Communist International which appeared early in April, 1929, a few weeks after the arrests. In the manifesto, "British imperialists" were branded as "the plunderers and hangmen of India" and the Swarajists and other bourgeois parties were assailed as "traitors to the Indian National Revolution." The Legislative Assembly was referred to as "this Diet of a handful of corrupted plutocrats," while the Simon Commission was denounced as "a gang of spies roving about India." This was in line with the assumption that "imperialism is hurling itself with all the force of military terror against the toilers of India." This "terror" was correlated with the hostile designs of Great Britain upon the Soviet Union, as the manifesto argued:

The plans of British imperialism for the coming world slaughter are set by its aim to hold fast its monopoly in the plunder of India without having to share out its profits with other imperialist robbers. Subjugated, exhausted, losing millions of her sons through starvation, India must also provide cannon fodder for the British war machine.³¹

The manifesto also attacked the Indian bourgeoisie following the new line of policy of the Sixth Congress that no popular front should be established between the proletariat, which the Communists hoped to control, and these bourgeois elements seeking autonomy or even complete independence for India.³²

Another blast from Moscow Comintern issued on April 7, 1929, specifically dealt with the Meerut arrests stating:

Imperialism is hurling itself with all the force of military terror against the toilers of India. Their trade union leaders, their newspaper editors and the participants of open conference[s] of workers and peasants are threatened with execution or with hard labour in prisons. Justice must be meted in the colonial chamber of torture without even the farce of a sworn jury or the staging of a trial. It is to open a new chapter in the bloody oppressions of the country with its 300,000,000 people.³³

Thus the arrest of thirty-two labour leaders in connection with the Meerut Conspiracy Case generated wide reaction outside India during the months following the arrests. Though the intensity of the reactions varied in degrees they were mostly critical of the Government and sympathetic towards the cause of the accused. The whole action was generally pictured as a measure against the rising trade unions and other organizations of the workers and youths of India who were striving for the economic and political emancipation of the country. While the British Government's policy was criticized abroad, the left-wing within India, being the direct target of the Government offensive, suffered most and tried to readjust itself to the new situation.

Left-wing in India : Reactions to the Arrests

Immediately following the Meerut arrests on March 20, 1929, as was expected, the left-wing in India reacted very sharply. Several meetings were organized by the different local trade unions and workers' groups in Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, and other places to protest against the arrest of the labour leaders. In Bombay, the reactions were the strongest.

As stated earlier fourteen textile mills were struck in pro-

test on March 21 and the G.I.P. Railwaymen's Union organized a huge protest meeting and procession on March 22.³⁴ On April 3, 1929, 2,000 workers of the G.I.P. Railway's workshop conducted another one-day strike to voice their protest against the arrest of Mr. Jhabwalla, president of their union.³⁵

In Calcutta, a large meeting called by the different trade unions of Bengal was held on March 25. Speeches were made by several local trade unionist leaders and a defence fund was set up for the aid of the accused in Meerut.³⁶

In Madras, various workers' organizations conducted a meeting on March 25, 1929, in which B. Shiva Rao, President of the Madras Labour Union and the Vice-president of the AITUC said that "the large number of arrests and the spectacular display of police and military strength at Bombay and other places" were designed "to afford a suitable background for the enactment of the Public Safety Bill and the Trades Disputes Bill."³⁷

Commenting on the arrests, *Krantil* (Bombay), the Marathi bi-weekly and the chief organ of the Bombay Workers' and Peasants' party, wrote on March 25, 1929:

If it be the design of the Government to crush the Labour movement by arresting and sentencing the Labour leaders on any charge, it will never succeed. [That] The capitalistic power has snatched away the leaders of the workmen and peasantry does not mean that the Labour class has met with a discomfiture in its struggle against capitalism but it really means that new tactics are coming into play in the same struggle.³⁸

The *G. I. P. Railwayman* (Bombay), the G.I.P. Railwaymen's Union's paper remarked on March 23:

We cannot too lightly set aside the new offensive that officialdom has launched against the organised Labour movement in the country. For our part we are not at all surprised at the latest exhibition of official high-handedness in the sweeping arrests and raids of prominent Labour leaders and Labour unions throughout the country. Only the inevitable has happened. If anything this parade of "Law and Order" is but a frank recognition of the growing consciousness of the hitherto neg-

lected masses of the country as to their economic and political rights. The determination and courage with which they have grasped the watchword of modern progression, namely, "integration", and the doggedness and persistence which they display in the matter of collected and organised action have, it seems, begun to shake the very foundations of the power-that-be. Let not the Government for a moment harbour the idea that a wholesale removal of the Labour leaders will in any way contribute to the sabotage of the Workers' Movement. The working class is no more the dumb-driven cattle. It has roused itself to the full consciousness of its rights. The fight against injustice and inequity will continue unabated and with redoubled energy.³⁹

Hugh Lester Hutchinson, whose arrest came about later, appealed editorially in his *New Spark* (Bombay) to the youth of the country to help defend the thirty-one arrested leaders :

Though the official leaders of Indian Nationalism be antagonistic or indifferent to the course of the Meerut prisoners it is the task of the radical youths of the country to strenuously endeavour to achieve sufficient financial support for heroic fellow fighters for India's freedom. They must realise it is not Communism that is attacked but the militant mass movement which Imperialism fully knows, would when developed be a menace to itself. As such all those who stand for India's liberation from the grip of Imperialism should rally to support financially as also by demonstrations the gallant 31.⁴⁰

On June 14, 1929, Lester Hutchinson was arrested in Nagpur on the same charges as the other thirty-one prisoners, under Section 121-A of the Indian Penal Code and was taken to Meerut for trial. In protest against Hutchinson's arrest the *New Spark* commented on June 16 :

We are astounded at this unexpected move of the Government, since we know that the activities carried on by Comrade Hutchinson both in the Indian Youth League and the Trade Union Movement were absolutely legal in character. He called on the workers and

youths of India to organise and carry to victory a united struggle for political and economic freedom. Since there is nothing illegal about such propaganda, we are amazed that Comrade Hutchinson should have been arrested by the Government. We hope that the Indian people will recognise the heroic self-sacrificing spirit shown by our brave and young Comrade, appreciate his fiery zeal to fight for exploited masses and see that he gets the moral and financial support at the trial.⁴¹

The arrest of Hutchinson, who was also the Vice-president of the G.I.P. Railwaymen's Union was criticized severely by the Unions' paper *G.I.P. Railwayman* (Bombay) which noted on June 19, 1929 :

The attack on the left-wing labour movement in India is thus a desperate attempt made by panicky Imperialism to save itself from the fate which awaits it before the onward march of British and Indian proletariat. . . . By this attack, British Imperialism also wants to prevent the alliance between the rural peasant and the worker in the town. British Imperialism expects to crush the working class movement in this country before the peasantry oppressed under the obnoxious theory of bourgeois state-landlordism, comes into the political arena as the rear guard in the struggle against imperialism. These are the plain facts behind the Meerut arrests. It is the duty of those that are left behind to foil the game of imperialist exploiters whether they be the type of Baldwin or Ramsey MacDonald. As for our fighting comrade who has just gone inside the Meerut prison we think, he is now in better company with the 31 by his side.⁴²

The reactions of most of the accused themselves is best reflected in the joint statement which eighteen of the prisoners presented as a part of their defence in the Meerut trial:

It is an attempt on the part of the Imperialist British Government of India to strike a blow at that force which it recognises as the real enemy which will ultimately bring about its overthrow, which has already taken up an attitude of irreconcilable hostility towards

it, and has already shown a very menacing strength—the masses of the poor and exploited population of this country. It is an attempt by the Imperialist Government to strike a blow at its enemy, not only by removing from the field the mere 31 individuals, but by reading a lesson to all who would follow the line of the mass revolutionary struggle in future, and by establishing a number of convenient legal precedence, which will facilitate the smashing of the workers' and peasants' movement by "lawful" and "constitutional" means. This case, in spite of the demands of the prosecution, is an attack upon the workers' Trade Union Movement, an attack upon the peasants' movement and an attack upon the movement for the Independence of India from British Imperialism.⁴³

Developments within the Left-wing in India

The rest of the year 1929 following the Meerut arrests proved to be a very difficult and critical period for the Indian left-wing movement. The immediate effects of the arrests were disastrous for the party and it virtually paralyzed the central organization of the CPI. With most of their experienced and trained leaders in jail, the responsibility of leadership fell upon the younger members, who showed a combination of enthusiasm and inexperience.

The new leaders had to face the gigantic task of salvaging the party or what was left of it. The last meeting of the CPI which was held in Bombay on March 17-19, 1929, had failed to formulate any clear policy with regard to the new Comintern line. The question of the status of the WPP and the organizational tangle of maintaining both a legal and an illegal Communist apparatus remained unresolved. The period after March, 1929, therefore, witnessed numerous confabulations between the Meerut prisoners, the Indian Communists outside the jail, the British Communists, and the Comintern. Amidst this confused ideological situation, the Communists outside held discussions with the Meerut Communist prisoners whenever they got an opportunity.⁴⁴ As a result, by the end of the year 1929, a clearer

policy was emerging, one veering round to the Comintern line.

Policy of the Communist International

Throughout 1929 the Communist International continued its efforts to project the new line adopted at its Sixth Congress in 1928. The Tenth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) was held in Moscow on July 3-19, 1929. By that time, Stalin had consolidated his power in Moscow and consequently he was able to compel the Comintern executive to adopt a tough "ultra left" policy. Tactical agreements with Indian nationalists, which the Sixth Congress had condoned, were to be abandoned in favour of a policy of "ruthless struggle against the Indian bourgeoisie."⁴⁶ Subsequently, the CPI was instructed to sever all ties with the nationalist movement and to attack all sections of the Congress party, including the left-wing group led by Jawaharlal Nehru.⁴⁰ The Independence for India League was characterized by the Russian leaders as a "vague organization of intellectuals", some of whose leaders—the reference here was to Subhas Chandra Bose—were "inclined toward fascism."⁴⁷ Both Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru were condemned for attempting "to stifle the rise of the revolutionary movement" and channel it toward moderate "bourgeois-reformism."⁴⁸

Otto V. Kuusinen⁴⁹ presented a detailed report on "the growth of the Indian Revolution" to the Tenth Plenum of the ECCI.⁵⁰ In this report, Kuusinen criticized the Indian Communists for failing to carry out the instructions of the Sixth Congress concerning workers' and peasants' parties. The existence of such parties, it was said, could "obliterate the bounds of the communist organization" and "drown the communist party."⁵¹ In India, Kuusinen reported, Communists were expending their energies in building up workers' and peasants' parties—against the Comintern's advice—with the result that their "greatest weakness" was the lack of a "firmly established" Communist Party. He also charged that the so-called Workers' and Peasants' Party had failed to take cognizance of the deepening agrarian crisis and had done almost no work among the peasantry.⁵² Following the Tenth Plenum, Communists in India were directed to disband

the WPP and to eschew all relations with both the Congress party and the Independence League.⁵³ In line with the Comintern's new policies, Clemens Dutt in mid-1929 criticized the WPP as too weak to "fulfill the needs of the proletariat" due to "the mixture of semi-reformist and class-conscious elements" represented within it. He predicted that the multi-class party would eventually collapse and be replaced by a "more firmly based revolutionary Communist party."⁵⁴

By the end of the year 1929, the Indian Communists came to accept the Comintern line especially with respect to the WPP. Under the emerging leadership of S. V. Deshpande and B. T. Ranadive,⁵⁵ the Indian Communists acknowledged that the WPP reflected the vacillating policy of the Indian petty bourgeoisie and that it was never able to clarify its ideology.⁵⁶ A continued alliance of the workers and peasants was favoured but it was held that this unity could be achieved only through a revolutionary working class party, that is, the Communist Party. With all of its leaders in jail, and, with this change in the CPI's policy towards it, the WPP became for all practical purposes defunct although it was never formally disbanded.

Split in the Indian Labour Movement

The 1928 general strike in the Bombay cotton mills had been ended when representatives of management and labour agreed on a resumption of work pending the results of an enquiry into the dispute by a Government-appointed Committee. On March 23, 1929, the Fawcett Committee issued its report. Soon thereafter the Joint Strike Committee and the Bombay Mill Owners' Association entered into negotiations to be based on the Committee's recommendations. The discussions, however, soon broke down. With the arrest of the top leaders of the WPP, younger, less experienced Communist trade unionists came to the fore. The GKU charged that union leaders were being systematically victimized by the mill owners, and largely on this basis, the new leaders of the union, B. T. Ranadive and S. V. Deshpande, broke off the negotiations and issued a call for a second general strike which was begun on April 26, 1929.

. The Government of Bombay appointed a Court of Enquiry

in July to investigate the dispute.⁵⁷ This body, after a careful study, issued a report the following September in which officials of the GKU were accused of failure to negotiate in good faith with the mill owners and of irresponsible behaviour including incitement to riot, intimidation of non-strikers, lightening strikes, and "invidious propaganda." The report concluded that the blame for the continued labour unrest in Bombay lay "wholly at the door of officials of the union [the GKU]."⁵⁸

The GKU suffered a great loss and ceased to be an effective force as a result of, first, the arrest of its most prominent leaders, and second, the consequences of the ill-considered strike of April, 1929.⁵⁹ Moderate trade unionists had opposed the strike from the beginning. The workers, having recently sustained a six-month strike, were not prepared to undergo another struggle with their employers. Moreover, the mill owners, faced with a market recession, were in a strong position to withstand a prolonged work stoppage.⁶⁰ By mid-September the strike had collapsed. The strikers returned to work on September 16, 1929, without having achieved any gains. Discredited by the failure of the general strike and the findings of the Court of Enquiry, the Bombay Communist trade unionists lost the support of a great many workers.⁶¹ As a result, membership in the GKU declined from approximately 54,000 members in December, 1928, to not more than 800 by the end of the next year.⁶²

Although the Communists had sustained heavy membership losses in their two largest unions, the GKU and the G.I.P. Railwayman's Union, they were able to dominate, with the support of militant nationalists within the trade union movement, the tenth annual session of the AITUC, which was held at Nagpur, on November 30 to December 1, 1929, under the presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru.

At this session the issue of international affiliation came up again with all its fury. The radical section of the Trade Union Congress succeeded in affiliating the GKU to the AITUC; this gave them a safe majority.⁶³ In the Subjects Committee meeting of the AITUC on the eve of the annual session, a split occurred between the moderates and the extremists over the proposal to affiliate the AITUC with the Pan-Pacific Secretariat, the Asian branch of the Comintern. The resolution was moved by Mr.

Despande and was passed by the majority in the house.⁶⁴ The moderates opposed this decision and a number of delegates under Mr. N. M. Joshi, withdrew from the conference and decided to boycott the open session. The Communists attempted a reconciliation when in the open session, Despande withdrew the resolution for affiliation with the Pan-Pacific Secretariat.⁶⁵ However, it was too late and the rift was unbridgeable. Apart from the question on affiliation, the two sections disagreed on several other issues as well. With the continued support of the nationalists, the Communists were able to obtain the endorsement of a number of resolutions opposed by the moderates. Some of these called for affiliation with the League Against Imperialism, the establishment of a "Socialist Republican Government of the Working Classes" in India, and the boycott of the Royal Commission on Labour (the Whitley Commission) and the forthcoming Round Table Conference.⁶⁶ Another point of disagreement was over the sending of delegates to the International Labour Organization which was proposed by the moderates and opposed by the Communists.

All efforts to restore unity, in the face of differences so deep as these, failed. Mr. N. M. Joshi had accepted appointments to both the Labour Commission and the Round Table Conference. Interpreting the passage of the resolutions on these issues as a wholesale repudiation of their views and objectives, Joshi, Chaman Lal, and other moderates withdrew from the AITUC.⁶⁷ In a statement the seceders maintained that they had taken the decision because the proceedings of the AITUC had revealed beyond doubt that the majority of its members "are determined to commit the Congress to a policy with which we are in complete disagreement."⁶⁸ The moderates later formed the Indian Trade Union Federation with V. V. Giri as President and R. L. Bakhale as General Secretary.⁶⁹ The new Federation's motto was "legitimate trade unionism free from Moscow influence."⁷⁰ The Indian Trade Union Federation was sympathetic to the British Trade Union Congress and later affiliated to the International Federation of Trade Unions.⁷¹

Thirty unions with a total claimed membership of approximately 96,000 joined the Indian Trade Union Federation. The AITUC, now controlled by the nationalists and Communists, re-

tained twenty-one unions with an overall claimed membership of 93,000,⁷² but almost half of this number represented the alleged membership of the GKU which, as previously noted, was reduced to less than a thousand members as a result of the failure of the 1929 general strike.

Following the secession, Subhas Chandra Bose was elected President of the AITUC, but the Communists won a majority of its important offices and captured the executive committee. S. V. Despande, secretary of the GKU, became general secretary. Muzaffar Ahmad, Mohammad Abdul Majid, president of the GKU, and D. B. Kulkarni were chosen as vice-presidents. Philip Spratt and Benjamin F. Bradley, on trial in Meerut, were elected to the executive committee.⁷³

The rupture of the labour movement and the marked decline in Indian trade unionism which followed were clearly due to the extremist tactics of Communist labour leaders combined with the deepening economic crisis. As a result of the Communists' uncompromising stance, organized labour in India was divided and its strength seriously reduced. Employers took advantage of labour's disunity and disarray to impose wage cuts, demotions, and a general retrenchment. Nationalist trade unionists became increasingly disenchanted with their Communist allies within the AITUC, and in 1931 a second split occurred within the organization.

While the Indian labour movement was undergoing this strain, the new "ultra-left" policy propounded by the Comintern at the Tenth Plenum of the ECCI became the subject matter of discussions amongst the Indian Communists after March, 1929. By the end of the year most of the proposals of the Tenth Plenum were accepted by the Indian Communists and accordingly the CPI developed its organizational structure in 1930. Consequently, the CPI's attitude towards the Indian National Congress underwent significant changes in keeping with the new Comintern policy. However, before discussing this change in the CPI's relationship with the National Congress, it is worthwhile to look at the various developments that were taking place in the nationalist movement as a whole during this period.

National Movement in India : Reactions to the Arrests

In the year 1929 the Indian National Congress prepared fervently for a showdown with the British Government. The news of the Meerut arrests, carried out on March 20, 1929, produced surprisingly strong responses from the leaders of the National Congress as well as its political arm, the Swarajist Party. Largely on the initiative of Jawaharlal Nehru, a Meerut Prisoners' Defence Committee was hastily created, under the chairmanship of Pandit Motilal Nehru. The Committee included a number of prominent nationalists like M. A. Ansari, Srinivasa Iyengar, Satya Pal, Nirmal Chandra Chunder, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, M. R. Jayakar, M. A. Jinnah, K. F. Nariman, G. D. Birla and others. Many of these leaders were moderate and conservative in their political outlook. On March 23, this Committee, which was formally set up by the Congress Working Committee, "contrary to its usual practice" made a grant of Rs. 1,500 towards the defence.⁷⁴ In addition, an appeal was made to the public over the signatures of Pandit Motilal Nehru, Pandit Malaviya, Srinivasa Iyengar, M. A. Ansari, N. C. Kelkar, Dr. Moonje and Mr. Aney to support the defence fund of the prisoners.⁷⁵ In a special meeting of the All-India Congress Committee held at New Delhi on March 27 and attended by notable nationalist leaders like Gandhi, Motilal Nehru, Pandit Malaviya, Srinivasa Iyengar, Dr. Ansari, Seth Jamnalal Bajaj and Jawaharlal Nehru, discussions centered round the question of the wholesale arrests of the labour leaders. The Committee condemned the Government's action and expressed the view that the action was the fore-runner of a still greater policy of repression. The Committee also declared that the ends of justice would have been better served if the trial was held in some presidential town and was assisted by a jury. The Meerut arrests were described as an action "aimed to strike a blow against the Labour movement in India."⁷⁶

Apart from Motilal Nehru, Srinivasa Iyengar, K. F. Nariman and others who took an active part in setting up the legal defence of the Meerut prisoners, even Mahatma Gandhi, whose apathy to Communism was undisguised, severely criticized the arrests. In an article in his weekly, *Young India* (Ahmedabad), he wrote:

The arrests of labour leaders or so-called communists

show that the Government is in a panicky state and is betraying the symptoms to which we have been used and which presage a period of terrorism. Evidently it believes in a periodical exhibition of its capacity to supersede all law and to discover to a trembling India the red claws which usually remain under cover. Of course the farce of a trial will be duly enacted. If the accused are wise they will not run into the trap and assist the farce by being represented by counsel. . . . It seems to me that the motive behind these prosecutions is not to kill communism, it is to strike terror.⁷⁷

Later, on his own initiative and quite unexpectedly, Gandhi visited the Meerut jail on October 27, 1929, and saw the Communist under-trials in their barracks.⁷⁸ He spent almost two hours with the prisoners and told them:

. . . in the present case by coming here I wanted in my bumble way to show in a practical manner that this prosecution is wrong and that in any event it is atrocious that you should be put under a heavy handicap by being tried in an inconvenient place like Meerut where you cannot get the facilities obtainable in the presidency towns for conducting a proper defence.⁷⁹

Amongst the nationalist leaders, by far the most important figure with respect to the Meerut Conspiracy Case was Jawaharlal Nehru. On March 21, Jawaharlal Nehru issued a statement in which he described the recent arrests as "primarily directed against the Labour movement and the Youth League." He claimed that the Government wanted to "strike terror in the hearts of those who work for Labour or Youth movement, by these arrests and searches."⁸⁰ He also sought to raise funds for the accused and used his international connections to secure outside sympathy and support. The fact that most of the defendants were Communists did not disturb him, for in his opinion, "the Meerut Trial" was "a blow against the whole working class."⁸¹ As the President of the AITUC, Jawaharlal Nehru appealed to the British Trade Union Congress on June 22:

In view of Government attempts to break the labour movement in India and hamper trade union organization by repressive legislation and arrest all prominent

workers, we trust your council will help the Indian trade union movement to fight repression. In particular, we request that you insist that accused in the Meerut trial are not deprived of the rights of jury trial, which most of them possess in their provinces. The Government is carrying on Meerut inquiry obviously as propaganda with their head publicity officer personally supervising public arrangements in Meerut. We request your Council to give moral and material support for defence.⁸²

In another personal letter of the same date to Walter Citrine, Secretary of the British Trade Union Congress, Jawaharlal Nehru argued:

I would like to point out that this trial cannot be isolated from the general situation and must be treated as one phase of the offensive which the Government here has started against the Labour movement. . . . There is a lot of shouting about communists and communism in India. Undoubtedly there are some communists in India, but it is equally certain that this cry of communism is meant to cover a multitude of sins of the Government. Of the 31 accused in the Meerut case, now 32 since Hutchinson's arrest, the majority knew little about communism. People connected with any kind of labour or peasant activity have been arrested and are being tried. Eight of those included in the Meerut case are members of the All-India Congress Committee. . . . The real issue is the breaking of the Trade Union movement in India. . . . We would like you to expose and oppose the whole policy underlying the recent labour legislation of the Government of India and the Meerut trial.⁸³

Mr. J. M. Sen Gupta, a prominent Congress leader, termed the Government action as a clever move designed to deter "the gradual consolidation of the strength of the labour movement in India" which was becoming a "menace to the continued exploitation by Capitalist concerns, European or Indian." He claimed that the "Bolshevik bogey" was "cleverly raised before the Indian public for the safe passage" of the Public Safety and the

Trades Disputes Bill in the Assembly. "The ostensible object is to suppress Bolshevism. The real object is to crush the infant labour organizations."⁸⁴

Pandit Govindballabh Pant, a conservative Congress nationalist commented:

The arrests have been made under the order of the Government of India which seem to have launched upon a campaign of repression and this is probably the first step they have taken in the direction. They seem anxious to strike terror in the country so as to check an advance. . . . The peasants and workers have their numerous grievances and only a few among them get a living wage and so long as they are kept in a deplorable condition no artificial restraint on those who want to organise them can mitigate the deep seated discontent prevailing among these classes. . . . There was absolutely no occasions for this display of might on the part of the Government.⁸⁵

Condemning the arrests, Mr. Bipin Chandra Pal told a public meeting in Calcutta that the Government's action was "nothing but an application of the policy of General Dyer to the administration of criminal law in this country."⁸⁶

Dr. Saif-ud-din Kitchlew, a noted Congress leader, while addressing a public meeting in Amritsar referred to the Meerut Conspiracy Case and said, "it had become a national affair in as much as it was intended to aim a blow at the organizations of peasants and workers."⁸⁷

Speaking about the Meerut arrests, Subhas Chandra Bose in a public statement requested the Indian Legislative Assembly to throw out the Public Safety Bill and Trades Disputes Bill as a fitting reply to the action of the Government. He called upon the young men of India to enlist themselves as active workers of the labour movement and to take the place of those arrested. He also urged all the labour organizations to compose their differences and make a bid for united action, and appealed to the public for funds for the trial of the arrested men.⁸⁸

Similar statements condemning the arrests were also made by Dr. B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, Dr. M. A. Ansari and other notable Congress leaders all over the country.⁸⁹ The fact that

eight of the accused in the Meerut Conspiracy Case were persons holding important offices in the Indian National Congress undoubtedly contributed to the solicitude of the leaders of that organization for the welfare of the Meerut prisoners.

Nationalist Press Reactions

Not only the Congress and nationalist leaders of the country, but also nationalist press of India accorded an extremely sympathetic attention to the Meerut prisoners. Throughout the country, newspapers of different shades of opinion almost un-animously condemned the arrests and expressed their sympathies with the accused. A sample of views and comments on the Meerut arrests as reported in the various leading Indian newspapers of the time are given below.

The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (Calcutta) of March 21, 1929, reported:

While there is a Public Safety Bill in the Assembly, public safety in India was seriously threatened yesterday by arrests and searches made on an all-India scale. . . . From far and near persons of all sorts and conditions are being gathered together at Meerut to stand their trial for having conspired to wage war against the King. . . . Among them are trade unionists well known for their anti-communist attitude and views, pseudo-communists and M.L.C.'s. . . . The trial will take place not at Bombay or Calcutta or any other central place, but at a provincial town where the defence will be seriously handicapped. Most of the accused persons are men of small means who will find it next to impossible to meet the heavy expenses of a proper defence in that town far away from their homes. There is also no fear of a jury trial. . . . Will not the action taken facilitate the passing of the Public Safety Bill and the Trade Disputes Bill in the Assembly? What would be a greater evidence of the danger that threatens India than the big swoop that has been made for communists in all parts of India? And what an impression will be produced on the world beyond India? Will not the

world think that the communists have all but conquered India?⁹⁰

The noted Bengali daily *Ananda Bazar Patrika* (Calcutta) commented on March 22:

We do not deny the fact that there is in India a sprinkling of foreign as well as Indian communists. A few of these are to be found in every civilized state throughout the world. It is their habit to openly preach their creed and the method adopted by them in furtherance of this object is also direct. Perhaps of genuine communists there are a few in India ; but we have never heard of the success of their propaganda work. The political movement of India—nay the Congress movement has always declared itself as an enemy of communism. So too the Labour movement directed by the Trade Union Congress. The authorities are determined to crush us by a repressive measure in pursuance of their policy of repression. If in these circumstances, justice and fair play are pleaded, they are certain to be refused and ignored as the helpless cry of the weak.⁹¹

The *Viswamitra* (Calcutta) editorialized on March 22:

Like cholera, plague and small-pox there are also seasons when there takes place an epidemic of arrests. This time the epidemic has spread all over India. The police have not, during the course of their search, found any revolvers or pistols. With the growth of national awakening in the country, repression is bound to increase. Imperialists have taken fright at the growing organisation of labour. The spread of communism is being interpreted as being dangerous for the country. It appears from all this that Lord Irwin's regime is going to be made as memorable as that of Lord Reading.⁹²

The *Forward* (Calcutta) of March 24 stated:

Mr. R. A. Horton, officer on special duty under the Director of Intelligence Bureau, Government of India, has been pleased to inform the world that the League against Imperialism is an organisation controlled by and subject to the Communist International of Russia. What the gentleman of the Intelligence Bureau does

not appear at all to have realised is that it is perfectly possible for an organisation as well as for an individual to be against imperialist exploitation without being anywhere near Communism. But possibly the whole thing is a case of deliberate misrepresentation and not of ignorance.⁹³

Commenting on the arrests *The Tribune* (Lahore) of March 23 1929, noted:

In the wholesale arrests and house searches made by the Police on Wednesday we have the first definite and incontestable proof of the beginning of the resolute government. . . . No manner of doubt, therefore, can exist as to these arrests being part of a deliberate and determined attempt to suppress the movement with which the 31 arrested persons are alleged to be connected. And this is exactly what a "resolute government" means. . . . In the present case it [the arrest] is deliberately provoked by men in authority for political reasons, and it is bound to do incalculable injury to its authors. Let not the Government delude itself into thinking that the forcible suppression of the labour and youth movements will end the trouble. It will really be the beginning of the end of its own irresponsible authority. The Simon Commission may make what reports it likes. The world will know what to think of a form of Government under which peaceful political or economic movements can be suppressed by force.⁹⁴

Referring to the arrests of Communist leaders, the weekly paper *Gujarati* (Bombay) of March 24, 1929, remarked:

The authorities have taken a short cut for putting down the fire of economic discontent prevailing in the country by resorting to the provisions of the law. . . . The main object of the arrests made by Government appears to be this that they want to frighten the people by enforcing the law and cow them down by means of severe punishments. As if by this means the fire of economic and political discontent smouldering in the hearts of the people would be pacified and the aspiration for independence become slackened!⁹⁵

The *Indian States Journal* (Bombay) of March 23 reported:

On Wednesday a concerted move was made by the Government to sweep into the Meerut net all the Communists all over India. The action is by no means surprising. For months past short-sighted capitalists in their despair have been screaming against the "Reds." . . . It is idle to speculate as to the fate that is in store for the arrested men. But the present action is symptomatic of the temper of the Government who are eager for "strong government." . . . We cannot but regard the present move of Government in this country as part of some predetermined Tory manoeuvre to influence the General Elections in England. . . . We may assure the Government that the locking up of Communists will not spell peace for bloated megalomaniacs like some of our millowners or save the Vested Interests from the Red Ruin which stares them in the face as a result of their own ineptitude and utter bankruptcy of talent. However that may be, Government have, by their present action, aggravated public discontent without doing any good either to themselves or to the Vested Interests which they have so valiantly espoused and made their own.⁶⁶

The *Servant of India* (Poona) remarked on March 28:

The rounding up of Labour leaders, only some of whom, we believe, profess Communistic opinions, will have, we are afraid [a] serious reaction on Indian public opinion in general. . . . It is very unfortunate that the prosecution should have been started at this juncture without an opportunity being taken to clear the Government of the suspicion that they would made the holding of Communistic opinions punishable *per se*.⁶⁷

Gujarati Mitra and Gujarati Darpan (Surat) of March 24 noted:

The arrest of about thirty-one communists all over India is ostensibly due to the keen desire of the Government of India to root out communism from the Indian soil. . . . We hope that the accused persons will be given all the facilities of defending themselves against

this grave charge. We cannot imagine why Meerut has been selected as a place of trial for these men. The Government explanation that it is a central place and a centre of communist activities is absolutely unconvincing. . . . The ulterior object of these arrests is to nip in the bud the Indian Labour movement. Most of the accused have been devoting their energies to organize Labour Unions throughout India. Many of them have led men to long strikes. Their activities were most unpleasant to Government. So an impatient Government might have thought of putting an end to their activities by rounding them up throughout the country. But we firmly hold that Trade Unionism . . . is not yet so bankrupt of prudent leadership as to die out with such a small blow against it as the arrest of a first batch of leaders.⁹⁸

Referring to the various public meetings held in different parts of the country to protest against the Meerut arrests, the *Sanj Vartaman* (Bombay) of March 27 remarked:

We do not at all want to discuss the merits or demerits of the Meerut case, but feelings of great anxiety have burst forth among the general public of this country as regards the repressive policy of Government lying behind the present arrests. If, at a time when the fight for Swaraj is being carried on vigorously in the country, Government have become ready to carry on their policy of repression, the temper of the people will not be toned down thereby. In this manner a disturbed condition has arisen in the country.⁹⁹

The Marathi weekly *Rastra Veer* (Belgaum) of March 26 commenting on the arrests of the labour leaders, wrote:

If it be the secret object of the Government to suppress even constitutional political agitation along with the communist agitation, none will sympathize with the Government and people will, on the other hand, be inclined to carry on vigorously the present political agitation. The Viceroy's refusal to allow the adjournment motion in connection with the arrests to be moved in the Assembly has increased the discontent among

the people. . . . There is sufficient room to believe that the present campaign constitutes indirectly an attack on the workers' and peasants' movement, and this will lead to serious discontent among the workers. The Government should bear in mind the prudent consideration that if it adopts a policy having an adverse effect on the workers' organizations, the workers will willingly accept the leadership of the Communists. The same is the case with the peasants. Again if anybody is giving the Government the wrong advice that the youths conspiring for independence or Swarajya must be smashed along with the Communists, then the Government will in pursuing that policy come to grief.¹⁰⁰

An Urdu paper, the Muslim weekly, *Ittehad* (Bombay) of March 24 wrote:

The immediate question before the labourers is that they should elect their leaders since those leaders who have been arrested, will be locked up in the jail after a fraudulent judicial prosecution, and to expect that they will get justice or a discharge from the Meerut court, is a mistaken idea and a broken hope. The judicial *tamasha* will last for a few days and the decision will be the same as has already been decided upon in the sanctuary of politics. We hope that the labourers who are to be found in lakhs, will, after sinking their mutual differences, present a united front. We cannot say whether the leaders, who have been arrested, are guilty or not under section 121. But the principle underlying the Government policy, is certainly condemnable, because it aims at disorganising the organisation and power of the labourers. . . . To attack the leaders of all the Labour parties of India at one and the same time, is a direct attack on the Labour movement, . . . Communism is of great assistance to the aims of the Indian National Congress, because its chief merit is that it is above all religious differences, a thing which is surely needed by the country just at this juncture. Although the Congress cannot become a Communist Congress yet it cannot overlook the help it has so far

received or will receive in the future from the Communist movement. It is, therefore, the duty of the Congress to help the labourers and to see that they are not disorganised. Any weakness on the part of the labourers would mean the weakening of the Congress itself. Communalism can be uprooted from India only with the help of Communism and the success of the Congress depends on the total disappearance of communalism from the soil of India. It is in this way that Communism is paving the way for Swaraj, and this is its sin in the eyes of Government.¹⁰¹

The fact that Meerut was chosen as the venue for the trial of the arrested leaders also drew severe criticism from the press. The *Indian National Herald* (Bombay) of March 26, commenting on this aspect wrote:

The efforts to put down the rising labour movement in this country by arresting almost all the noted leaders and herding them together in Meerut in these hot days has aroused much discontent in the country. . . . Heaven only knows why, of all places, Meerut is chosen for this spectacular trial, unless, as someone has suggested, it is with a view to deprive the Labour leaders of the help of a jury and also to give them the benefit of the Allahabad High Court. After the last Communist trial [at Kanpur], in which both Messrs. Shaukat Usmani and Dange got four years each, Pundit K. Malaviya said that everything was possible in the Allahabad High Court, and evidently the Government of India feel quite safe in taking the case there after succeeding with the last case which left a very bad odour behind it.¹⁰²

The same issue was taken up by almost all the leading newspapers of the country. As the Gujrati weekly *Praja Bandhu* (Ahmedabad) of March 31 noted:

By selecting Meerut as the venue of trial Government have indirectly imposed great hardships and inconveniences upon the accused. A majority of these accused persons hail from Provincial capitals like Bombay, Calcutta and Allahabad and hence they find Meerut to

be a too distant and unsuitable place for their trial. Moreover, by engaging a leading English barrister of the Calcutta Bar for the prosecution of the case Government themselves have indirectly admitted the gravity of the case. In fact Mr. Crerar, the Home Member of the Government of India, declared in the Assembly that arrested Labour leaders have been accused of the grievous offence of conspiring against the King-Emperor to deprive him of his sovereignty over India and are to be tried under section 121-A of the Indian Penal Code. In view of this, Government ought to have selected one of the Provincial capitals like Bombay, Calcutta or Allahabad where the accused can easily procure sufficient and suitable legal advice and help for their defence against such a serious charge.¹⁰³

The arrest of the thirty-one labour leaders thus created a tense atmosphere in the nation. The nationalist leaders, the nationalist press, and others some of whom had previously been quite critical of Communism, all almost unanimously condemned the arrests and sympathized with the accused.¹⁰⁴

Although the nationalist leaders and the nationalist press reacted sharply to the Government measures against the left-wing leaders of India, the reaction did not last very long. After the immediate burst of sympathy for the arrested leaders and bitter criticism of the Government's action following the arrests, there was a definite decline in the nationalist leaders' interest in the Meerut prisoners. The Congress party's pre-occupation with the rapid development of events in the nationalist front, its preparation for the Lahore Congress and the impending civil disobedience movement, soon overshadowed the Meerut arrest incident. The nationalist press made less frequent comments on the Meerut prisoners after April, 1929, and almost no mention of the arrested labour leaders was made by any prominent Indian nationalist leader after that date.¹⁰⁵ Although several public meetings were convened by the Congress party and the various youth organizations during the later part of the year, in which prominent leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, Srinivas Iyengar and others presided and spoke, they made no further mention of the Meerut arrests.¹⁰⁶ Even the funds of the Meerut

Prisoners' Defence Committee which was established by the Congress leaders following the arrests, soon became depleted as no real contributions were made by the nationalist leaders. Muzaffar Ahmad described this lack of support on the part of the Congress leaders in the following words:

The Congress set up a Meerut Defence Committee with Pandit Motilal Nehru and Jawaharlal Nehru as its President and Secretary respectively. . . . However, we did not hear of anyone except Pandit Motilal Nehru and Doctor Ansari making any contribution to the Defence Fund. Though many of the big Congress leaders had promised to make handsome contributions, the promises were not kept. . . . Even before the completion of the preliminary inquiry at the Magistrate's Court, . . . the Defence Committee had lost all signs of vitality. . . . When we were about to be committed to the Sessions, Pandit [Jawaharlal] Nehru informed us (not this time in a personal capacity but on behalf of the Congress) that in view of the impending Civil Disobedience Movement, the Congress could no longer look after our Case.¹⁰⁷

One of the chief reasons for this decline in the nationalist leaders' interest in the Meerut prisoners and the Meerut trial was their pre-occupation with the forthcoming confrontation with the British Government. The year 1929 saw a crucial and important phase in India's nationalist struggle for independence. At its Calcutta session in December, 1928, the Congress party had given the Government of India the ultimatum that either Dominion Status was to be granted in one year or the Party would return to the demand for complete independence to be followed by a campaign of non-violent non-cooperation. Throughout 1929, preparations were made for launching a civil disobedience movement against the Government. In July the Congress Working Committee resolved to advise the Party members to resign their seats in the legislatures should the *swaraj* movement be launched.¹⁰⁸ In September the presidency of the Congress passed from Motilal Nehru to his son Jawaharlal.¹⁰⁹

In an attempt to strengthen the position of the moderates within the Congress Party and to forestall the threatened civil

disobedience campaign, the Viceroy Lord Irwin, on October 31, 1929, one month before the Congress was to convene at Lahore, declared that it was the opinion of the British Government "that the natural issue of India's constitutional progress" was the attainment of Dominion Status. The Viceroy also announced the convening of a Round Table Conference at which British and Indian representatives would confer on India's constitutional advancement.¹¹⁰ This was also an attempt to conciliate Indian opinion, which had earlier reacted sharply against the absence of any Indian member on the Simon Commission.¹¹¹ It was the first time that the British Government had conceded to Indians the right to share in the shaping of their own constitution.

In response to the Viceroy's statement, leaders of the Congress Party and several other political parties conferred at Delhi on November 1 and 2 and issued a manifesto accepting the invitation to participate in the Round Table Conference provided certain conditions were met. One of these conditions stipulated that discussions at the Conference must be on the basis of full Dominion Status and that immediate changes must be made in the conduct of the Government of India to approximate such status.¹¹² However, during a British Parliamentary debate on India in November, Irwin's pledge was seriously undermined and severely criticized by the Conservatives, and the Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, made no effort to reassure Indian political opinion.¹¹³ When on November 11, 1929, the British Prime Minister assured the House of Commons that the Viceroy's declaration did not imply any change in Government policy, the hopes of the Indian nationalist leaders were badly shattered. Following this disclosure the Congress Party withdrew its support of the Delhi manifesto.

The feeling of distrust hardened in India. At a special All-Party Conference in Allahabad on November 16, 1929, Jawaharlal Nehru along with Subhas Bose, criticized the assembled leaders for being taken in by an "empty statement", and both resigned from the Congress Working Committee.¹¹⁴ In late December Jawaharlal Nehru presided over an emotionally-charged Lahore Congress session. The delegates were in no mood for showing any conciliatory gestures. A few days earlier an attempt had been made to assassinate Lord Irwin. A resolu-

tion introduced by Gandhi deploring the incident and congratulating the Viceroy and Lady Irwin on their escape was almost defeated. On a division vote, it passed by the narrow margin of 904 to 823.¹¹⁵

In sharp contrast to the Calcutta Congress session of 1928, the Communist and trade union leaders of India played a very insignificant role in the Lahore session, and socialist ideas were strongly proclaimed by the radical faction of the Congress party under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Bose and others. In a moving presidential address Jawaharlal Nehru claimed:

I must frankly confess that I am a Socialist and a republican and am no believer in kings and princes or in the order which produces the modern kings of industry, who have greater power and whose methods are as predatory as those of old.¹¹⁶

He acknowledged that the Congress could not adopt a full socialist programme immediately. But "India will have to go that way . . . if she seeks to end her poverty." Speaking as a champion of the peasants and urban workers he called for basic economic and social change. Taking issue with Gandhi he criticized the theory of trusteeship (of wealth) and paternalism as "equally barren. . . . The sole trusteeship that can be fair is the trusteeship of the nation. . . ." He also differed with Gandhi on the question of violence.

The great majority of us, I take it, judge the issue not on moral but on practical grounds, and if we reject the way of violence, it is because it promises no substantive results. But if the Congress . . . comes to the conclusion that methods of violence will rid us of slavery, then I have no doubt that it will adopt them.

Violence is bad, but slavery is worse.¹¹⁷

When the one year ultimatum expired at midnight on December 21, 1929, the Congress passed a resolution interpreting its goals of *swaraj* as complete independence. The Congress also announced its intention to prepare for civil disobedience and an immediate boycott of the Central and Provincial Legislature. At the Madras Congress in 1927, independence had been declared as a distant goal; at the Lahore session it became an immediate objective.

On January 26, 1930, Indian nationalists celebrated their first Independence Day by the reading of the Lahore independence resolution and the hoisting of the national flag in public gatherings throughout India.¹¹⁸ The event marked the beginning of a momentous year for the Indian nationalist movement. Gandhi began his campaign by initiating the salt march and breaking the salt law on April 6, 1930, and the countrywide response was stupendous. Throughout the land, Indians courted arrest by emulating his deed. Alarmed, the Government arrested Gandhi and attempted to suppress the movement, but it was too late. Gandhi's arrest precipitated widespread defiance of civil authority. Within a short time the nationalist movement was broadened. Thousands of Indians, including peasants and women, participated for the first time in the independence struggle.¹¹⁹

The civil disobedience movement, once it was underway, did not long remain nonviolent. But this time, unlike 1922, Gandhi did not call off the campaign on this account. Soon terrorists and nationalist-revolutionary activities revived in Bengal and other places. As a result, a wave of terrorism, which was to last until 1934, spread throughout Bengal and the provinces of the U.P. and the Punjab as well.¹²⁰ Faced with a challenge of unprecedented magnitude, the Government of India was compelled to make large-scale arrests. It has been estimated that by the summer of 1930, 60,000 Congressmen, including many of the party leaders, were in prison.¹²¹ Despite the absence of Congress leaders, however, the civil disobedience campaign continued on its own momentum for the rest of the year.

Communist Party of India and the Indian National Congress

During the course of the year 1929 there were increasing indications of the revolutionary potential in the Indian national movement. Socialist ideas, disseminated by Jawaharlal Nehru and other left-wing leaders, had become fashionable among Indian educated elite; the workers in the trade union movement were falling more and more under the dominion of Communist and pseudo-Communist leaders; and mounting unrest throughout the country resulted in sporadic outbursts of terrorism. The year was climaxed by the declaration at the annual Congress session in

Lahore of the goal of complete independence. The anti-Government campaign, when it was launched the following April, met with an enthusiastic response by an aroused Indian public. Indian Communists, however, were unable to take advantage of the upsurge of nationalist, anti-colonial sentiment that was unleashed by Mahatma Gandhi. Instead, they turned against and attacked the nationalist movement and the nationalist leaders, following the policy directives of the Comintern.

The League Against Imperialism which by the middle of 1929 was completely under the control of the Communist International also started following the same line of policy *vis-a-vis* the Indian National Congress. At the second session of the League, held in Frankfurt in July, 1929, a resolution was passed criticizing Gandhi and his supporters for compromising with the British and for allegedly suppressing the revolutionary urge of Indian workers. Later in the year the clash came into the open.¹²²

Jawaharlal Nehru in November, 1929, signed the "Delhi Manifesto", a Gandhi-inspired compromise to render civil disobedience unnecessary if Dominion Status were granted immediately. As head of the International Secretariat of the League Against Imperialism, Virchandranath Chattopadhyaya wrote to Nehru from Berlin on December 4, 1929, accusing him of a "betrayal of the Indian masses" in signing the Delhi Manifesto.¹²³ A similar criticism of Nehru was made by Reginald Bridgeman, Secretary of the British branch of the League Against Imperialism. Nehru was incensed. His relationship with the League became progressively more strained and he was eventually expelled from it. As President of the Indian National Congress he directed the following April that his party sever all connections with the League Against Imperialism.¹²⁴

Rather than welcoming the civil disobedience movement in 1930, the Comintern dismissed it as merely an "oppositional manoeuvre" forced on a reluctant Congress by the "pressure of the masses."¹²⁵ At the end of the year a document was published in *International Press Correspondence* entitled a "Draft Platform of Action of the C.P. of India", which called for the denunciation not only of Gandhi but of "left nationalist reformists" such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose, who were now considered to be "the most harmful and dangerous obstacles to

victory of the Indian revolution" and whose exposure was held to be "the primary task" of the CPI. Indian Communists were directed to work independently of the Congress party for the "violent overthrow of British rule" and "the establishment of a Soviet Government . . . an Indian Federal Workers' and Peasants' Soviet Republic."¹²⁰ The draft platform became the subject of heated discussion within the CPI. Although it gave pause to many, it was eventually adopted by the party as the basis of its programme.¹²¹ This programme, more than any attack by the British Government, led to the political isolation of the Communists in India.

The revolutionary potential inherent in the political atmosphere of India during 1929 was not utilized by the Indian Communists. Sympathetic to Communists, if not to Communism, increasingly vigorous, and radiating an atmosphere hospitable to radicalism, the nationalist movement in 1929-1931 would seem to have been an ideal field for the Communists to work in India. However, by the end of the year 1929, the Comintern policy was unequivocally ultra-leftist and anti-nationalistic. Moscow took no account of the actual situation in India; instead its instructions forced the Indian Communists to turn their backs on the fertile field of Indian nationalism and to isolate themselves from the wellspring of Indian political life. The new Draft Platform of Action accepted by the CPI laid down a policy most likely to arouse the hostility of all politically active elements in Indian society. It was aimed at the very strata from which the Indian Communists had been recruited, and from which they had received sympathetic hearings. The Draft Platform was a "bill of divorce" from the main nationalist movement."¹²²

Thus the initial advantage that the Communists had secured in the labour movement in India during 1928 and early 1929 soon disappeared. After a short period of dynamic growth of Communism in different sections of Indian politics, Communist strength declined precipitously. This failure can be attributed to three major causes:

First, the Government measures to crush Communism in India succeeded, at least in the short run. The Meerut arrests almost overnight left the whole left-wing movement of India leaderless. Second, the new leadership of the Indian Communists

was too inexperienced and made mistakes in the trade union field. Third, the "ultra-left" policy prescribed by the Tenth Plenum of the E.C.C.I. meant that Indian Communists, instead of exploiting the prevailing anti-imperialist and anti-Government atmosphere in India and co-operating with the sympathetic left-wing of the Indian National Congress, attacked them and became politically isolated.

CHAPTER IV

Government Actions following the Meerut Arrests

AS discussed before in Chapter Two, the Government of India's growing concern with the development of left-wing activities in the country during 1928-29 was responsible for a series of measures undertaken to curb and crush the Communist movement in India, leading up to the arrest of thirty-one principal active leaders of the movement on March 20, 1929, in connection with the Meerut Conspiracy Case. However, the launching of the Meerut Communist Conspiracy Case did not end the efforts of the officials to proceed with other measures which they had already envisaged with a view to arresting the growth of Communism in India. Some of the notable Government measures undertaken during March, 1929 to December, 1929, in this connection, will be discussed in the following pages.

Fawcett Committee Report

As noted in Chapter Two above, following the large number of mill strikes in Bombay in 1928, a Riot Enquiry Committee under the chairmanship of Charles Fawcett was appointed in October, 1928, to consider the introduction of the Standardisation Scheme. Three days after the arrest of the thirty-one labour leaders on March 20, 1929, the Fawcett Committee published its official report on March 23, 1929. In this report the Committee recommended:

. . . We regard the proposals of the Mill-owners' Association (a) for Standardisation of wages, duties and numbers of operatives in

a mill . . . and (b) for Standing Orders for the operatives about the conditions of their employment, as being in the main fair and reasonable. On the other hand we consider that, while there is justification for the Associations' proposal to make a cut of 7½ per cent. in weavers' wages, . . . there are reasonable objections to be urged against its adoption in the present circumstances, and we recommend that it should be dropped by the Association, provided the Labour leaders undertake to co-operate in working the Standardisation Scheme.¹

The Committee in its report further recommended that "the Government should take drastic action against the activities of the Communists in Bombay", and also raised the question whether the Trade Union Act should not be so amended as "to exclude communists from management in registered trade unions."²

On the whole, the findings of the Fawcett Committee were definitely unfavourable to the interests of the trade unionist movement of the period.

Some of the leading moderate nationalist papers termed the Fawcett Committee Report as "fair" and "justifiable". The *Indian National Herald* (Bombay) considered that the Committee "have done their work in a spirit of justice and with a clear desire within the limits to hold the scales even between owners and the workers."³ The *Bombay Chronicle* of March 25 remarked that

The report of the Fawcett Strike Enquiry Committee makes, on the whole, a fair recognition of the claims of industrial workers engaged in the city's principal industry. Though the Seventeen Demands of the workers are not conceded equally, the balance of the Committee's findings is distinctly on the side of the workers.⁴

However, the more radical section of the nationalist press was bitterly critical of the report. Thus the *Indian States Journal* (Bombay) of April 6 wrote:

We can hardly congratulate the Fawcett Committee on their report. Their recommendations have erred sadly by being one-sided almost from start to finish. . . . If the Committee have been acting as counsel for the Mill representatives they could not have done better. . . .

The whole thing seems to be a farrago of nonsense and we are constrained to think that the Committee could not have made a worse exhibition of its ignorance of human psychology or strong class prejudice.⁵

The *Kranti* (Bombay) of March 31, commenting on the report noted:

On Saturday the 23rd of March 1929 ended the period of truce as the Report of the Fawcett Committee was out on that day. . . . The reasons set forth by the Committee in justification of the cut in the wages in the weaving departments are quite unconvincing to labour. The system of calculation given in the new project is very intricate. In this calculation the owners will surely try to deceive the labourers. The demand that no labourer should receive anything less than thirty rupees has been brushed aside by the Committee with the remark that they were not bound to consider such new proposals. . . . On the whole we are forced to say that the Report has been written with an eye to the capitalist interests and whatever few suggestions beneficial to labour it contains are made through sheer necessity and taking into consideration the increasing strength of the labour movements.⁶

Public Safety Ordinance

The Government effort to secure the passage of the Public Safety Bill in the Legislative Assembly having failed in September, 1928, the bill was referred to a Select Committee during the winter session of the Assembly. As reported by the Select Committee, the Public Safety Bill was scheduled for discussion once again in the Assembly on March 21, 1929. However, the President of the Assembly, Mr. Vithalbhai Patel, ruled on that date that the consideration of the bill be postponed till April 2.⁷ When the issue was taken up on April 2, Mr. Patel suggested that the fundamental basis for the bill was virtually identical with that of the conspiracy case launched by the Government and consequently that it would not be possible to argue the case for the bill without arguing the case for the prosecution and making

statements which were likely to prejudice the trial. The President accordingly advised the Government either to "postpone the bill pending the Meerut trial or, if they attach greater importance to passing this bill at this juncture, to withdraw the Meerut case and then proceed further with the bill."⁸

On April 4, Mr. Cicerar delivered the Government's response to the President's earlier ruling by declaring that the Government refused to accept either of the alternative suggestions put before them by the President, and concluded:

The submission of Government, therefore, is that in accordance with the rules of the House you [President] should direct the House to proceed, as soon as may be, with the consideration of the Public Safety Bill.⁹

After duly considering the Government's reply, the President of the Assembly re-affirmed his view on April 11, 1929, saying that he was convinced that no debate was possible on the bill during the pendency of the trial and any debate on it under the circumstances would be a fraud and a farce. So he ruled that the further consideration of the bill under the circumstances was out of order.¹⁰

On April 12, the Viceroy Lord Irwin addressed a joint session of both Houses of the Indian Legislature. Referring to the President's ruling he announced his decision to issue an ordinance embodying the Public Safety Bill and to secure the amendment of the rules to prevent the President of either House from interrupting normal legislative procedure.¹¹

On April 13, 1929, the Viceroy acting under the authority of Section 72 of the Government of India Act which enabled him in case of emergency to promulgate ordinances for the peace and good government of British India, issued the "Public Safety Ordinance, 1929" which granted the Government the same powers it had sought to secure through the legislation.¹²

The invoking of the Public Safety Ordinance was criticized severely by prominent Indians as well as by the nationalist press. Mahatma Gandhi commenting on the ordinance wrote in his Gujarati weekly *Navajivan* (Ahmedabad) of April 21:

By issuing the Ordinance His Excellency the Viceroy has showed the futility of the Councils. The institutions like Councils, etc., are toys in the hands of the Execu-

tive officers with which they play till they like and destroy them when they do not give them satisfaction. Hence Swaraj cannot be secured by such toys.¹³

The *Basumati* (Calcutta) of April 13 noted:

The country will hold that the passing of the Bill by Ordinance is quite uncalled for, in as much as the situation is not such or so very grave as to necessitate a drastic step like the one the Viceroy has chosen to take. We should have been glad if in overruling the President's ruling, his Government preferred to bring forward a vote of censure on the President, or better still dissolve the Assembly and made the question an electoral issue. That would have been a constitutional procedure. Ordinance has the practical effect of supplanting the constitution.¹⁴

The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (Calcutta) of April 14 wrote:

As for the new weapon in the armoury of the Government, it is better that it has had to be obtained by them through the agency of the Governor-General independent of the Legislature. Constituted as the latter body is, it is almost sure that had the Public Safety Bill been proceeded with, it would have been passed with the help of the officials and their *jo-hukum* [as the master commands] henchmen. That would have had the effect of misleading the uninformed world opinion and giving an opportunity to the Government to parade the vote of the Assembly as the voice of the country.¹⁵

The *Tribune* (Lahore) commented on April 17:

We have no hesitation in saying that the decision arrived at by Lord Irwin's Government with respect to the situation created by President Patel's ruling on the Public Safety Bill is entirely and fundamentally wrong. The promulgation of the Public Safety Ordinance involves a two-fold invasion upon the rights of the public. The substance of the Ordinance is open to all the grave objections to which the Public Safety Bill was open. Not only is it unnecessary and uncalled for, but it amounts to the taking away in an important class of cases of one of the elementary rights of accused per-

sons, the right of open and fair trial by an independent and properly constituted tribunal according to the ordinary forms of law. The manner in which the Ordinance has been passed is just as objectionable as its substance. An Executive-made law is in its very nature a lawless law because the assumption by the Executive of the power of making laws deprives laws of their essential character of being the expression of what Rousseau called "the general will."¹⁶

The *Mahratta* (Poona) of April 21 remarked:

We would not have demurred to the assumption of extra-ordinary powers by Government, had there been the slightest necessity for it. As things stand, there is none. The powers are required to deport British subjects carrying on subversive propaganda in India. At the most liberal computation there are hardly three of such undesirables whom Government can publicly name. The Viceroy spoke of "the full knowledge of much that can necessarily not be publicly disclosed" but obviously it was unfair to ask for special powers from the Assembly without taking that body into confidence. Just as foreigners of this description can be dealt with under the present powers, just as, again Indians of the same type can be disposed of under the present law, so it was not impossible for Government to have done with British subjects by methods now within the control of Government, say by severe application of the passport regulations. Foreign money too could be intercepted by Government in more than one way, if they meant to do so. There was, thus, no reason at all for the special measures at the cost of the popular furor and even the constitutional forms of the ordinary administrative and legislative work.¹⁷

Trades Disputes Act

As noted earlier the Trades Disputes Bill was referred to a Select Committee in the Assembly on February 11, 1929. The bill slightly modified by the Committee, was taken up for consi-

deration in the Legislative Assembly on April 2, 1929. Once again a debate raged over the bill and finally after four days of deliberation and speeches by both the Government representatives and the members of the Opposition, on April 8, the whole bill, as modified by the Select Committee, was passed by fifty-six votes to thirty-eight.¹⁸

Coming so soon after the Meerut arrests, the enactment of the Trades Disputes Act was considered as yet another Government attack upon the working class and the labour organizations of India. The *Railwayman* (Bombay) of April 13 commenting on the passage of the Act noted:

The Government is trying to put down the labour movement by passing laws like the Trades Dispute Bill in order to protect itself and the capitalists. In passing this Bill the Government and the Capitalists seem to have the idea that the Bill will suppress the present labour movement which is in full swing and then being able to crush the labourers they will be quite at ease. But we emphatically declare it to-day that this idea of the Capitalists is quite false and erroneous. For the labour movement in this country is based on legal and constitutional grounds and the present Bill will have no effect whatsoever on it. The Bill containing as it does some sections unfavourable to the labour movement, met with the disapproval not only of the various labour unions but of several owners also. Not only this, but many of the members of the Assembly also vehemently opposed it. Even though the Government decide to pass the Bill into law and thus try to deprive the labourers of their rightful privileges nothing good will come out of it. But on the contrary the unrest among the labourers in the country will increase and there is a probability of a recurrence of the atmosphere which was created at the time of the Rowlatt Act.¹⁹

The *Kamkari* (Bombay), a Marathi weekly, wrote on April 14, 1929:

The Trades Disputes Bill has totally deprived the workers of their independence. A Bill has been passed which turns the labourers into slaves from Africa or

cattle in the stable. Henceforward the labourers must not try to redress the grievances nor must they show by their conduct that the oppression has become intolerable. And if anyone tries to give vent to his feelings, if anyone leaves the hell in the form of the workshop, he will be sent to prison. . . . The members of the Assembly are interested in the mills ; the capital belonging to their relatives is locked up in the industry. And these people will suffer loss if the labourers go on strike as a protest against oppression. The Public Safety Bill is being opposed because it is likely to deprive a few persons of their vocation. But the Trades Disputes Bill will make the labourers suffer the tortures of hell while yet living.²⁰

Some of the noted left-wing papers in condemning the Trade Disputes Act blamed the nationalist leaders as well as the Government for the passage of the Bill. Thus *Kranti* (Bombay) commented on April 10, 1929:

The storm raised by the President of the Legislative Assembly over the Public Safety Bill proved of use to Government and the capitalists in getting the Trade Disputes Bill safely passed through the Legislative Assembly. It does not seem possible that the members of the Legislative Assembly did not know that the provisions of the Trade Disputes Bill were more dangerous than those of the Public Safety Bill. But the friends of the capitalists in the Legislative Assembly hatched a plot to raise a storm over the Public Safety Bill which has become useless owing to the arrest of Messrs Spratt and Bradley and to pass a Bill which strengthens the position of the capitalists and strikes at the very root of the labour movement.²¹

Whitley Commission

As announced by the Viceroy on January 28, 1929, an Enquiry Commission was proposed to be set up under the Chairmanship of Mr. Whitley to examine the conditions of labour in India. The Commission was duly selected on July 4, 1929 ;²²

its duties were to inquire into and report on "the existing conditions of labour in industrial undertakings and plantations in British India, on the health, efficiency and standard of living of the workers, and on the relations between employers and employed, and to make recommendations."²³

The Commission started its work at Karachi on October 15, 1929, and visited all the major Provinces and administrative areas except Burma, before it sailed for England towards the end of March, 1930. At almost every important center visited by it, the Commission received a great amount of co-operation from employers and employed alike, and collected valuable evidence, both written and oral. The only notable difficulty experienced during the tour was the boycott declared against the Commission by the All-India Trade Union Congress during its session held at Nagpur at the end of November, 1929. The subject of boycotting the Commission became a major issue in the Nagpur session of the AITUC and representatives of thirty unions, including some *ex-officio* members of the Executive Council of the AITUC resigned as a protest against the decision in favour of boycott and formed an independent organization known as the All-India Trade Union Federation. The Commission resumed its work in the later part of 1930 and submitted the complete report in June, 1931. The report is a precise and insightful study of labour conditions and industrial problems in India in the pre-1930 period. After an exhaustive enquiry, the Commission recommended in 1931 that employers should adopt a more liberal policy towards "recognition" of unions,²⁴ and that Government should take the lead in the case of their own industrial employees. It favoured a liberalization of the provision in the Trade Union Act, 1926, relating to the inclusion of "outsiders" in trade union executives. Further, the Commission was particularly critical of the Trades Disputes Act and the prevailing Government approach to the settlement of industrial disputes, as being influenced unduly by considerations of public order.²⁵

Thus while a conspiracy case was launched to make the notable left-wing leaders inactive in the Indian political scene, the Government continued its operation against Communism in India in other fields as well. Aside from the significant role that the foreign Communist agents had played in India, the other

factor which has posed an immediate problem for the Government of India was the situation on the labour front. The Communist accomplishments in the labour movement in general and the trade union movement in particular during 1927-28 were perilous in the official point of view. Several measures were contemplated to meet the situation, the most important of which were the proposed Trades Disputes Bill, the appointment of the Fawcett Committee and that of the Royal Commission on Labour. Of these, the Trades Disputes Bill was designed in a fashion to restrict the outbreak of industrial strikes which were causing a great deal of hardship for the Government as well as for the private businessman of the country. The Fawcett Committee was an answer to the pressing crisis in the textile mills of Bombay Province. It was an attempt on the part of the Government to mediate between the mill owners and the mill workers of Bombay. The Royal Commission (or the Whitely Commission) was appointed by the Parliament in response to the persistent demands both in England and in India for a thorough enquiry into the actual conditions of labour in India. Lastly, the Public Safety Bill was legalized as an ordinance more as a preventive measure against the danger of future foreign Communist agents working in India, than as a punitive measure.

Meerut Conspiracy Case : Significant Features

In Chapter Three we have discussed some of the important events that occurred over the period following the Meerut arrests, from March to December, 1929. A relevant event of that period which was not discussed therein was the beginning of the actual Meerut trial. The trial was formally inaugurated in June, 1929, and the first phase of its enquiry was completed by December, 1929. This initial portion of the trial proceedings which took place during the time span of our inquiry (upto the end of 1929) will be discussed in the following pages. A detailed examination of the entire legal proceedings in the case, which lasted for almost four years, however, is outside the scope of this study.²⁰ But in order to appreciate the full significance of the Meerut Conspiracy Case as a British reaction to left-wing politics in India during 1928-29, and to get a historical perspective of the case in the

context of events of that period, some of the notable features of the case, as a whole, will be mentioned briefly.

Beginning of the Trial

The thirty-one persons arrested on March 20, 1929, at various parts of the country were all gathered together at Meerut and were held in jail by the local police, who took a fresh remand at the expiry of every two weeks.²⁷ As a result of the numerous searches carried out by the police following the arrests, a large number of papers, letters, documents and books were seized and the prosecutors had a difficult time sorting out the incriminating documents they needed to use against the accused in the trial. A conspiracy trial under British Indian Legal Code had to be preceded by a preliminary enquiry by a Special Magistrate. This enquiry for the Meerut prisoners had a very delayed start due to the massive documents collected as a result of the searches. The Indian Government as well as the Home Office in London were keen on starting the enquiry without delay. The Home Department of the Government of India sent a series of letters to the chief prosecutor Mr. Langford James urging him to begin the trial as early as possible. Mr. H. G. Haig, the Home Department Secretary, Government of India, in a letter dated April 29, 1929, to Mr. Langford James made the Government's anxiety very clear:

We are rather uneasy at the suggestion made in two recent letters from [Special Investigator] Horton that so much material has been recovered in the searches that it may be at least another two months before you are ready to open the case. . . . We are definitely of opinion that earlier the case can be started without prejudice to the result the better it is from our point of view, and while it might no doubt be possible to elaborate considerably by taking another two or three months so as to fit every bit of evidence discovered at the searches into its appropriate place. From the practical point of view we are disposed to think that this elaboration might be purchased too dearly.²⁸

The Secretary of State for India was also putting pressure on

the Indian Government to begin the enquiry at an early date. In reply to the Secretary of State's telegram in this connection, the Viceroy informed him on May 7, 1929:

Material recovered in searches was very voluminous, and work of examination, which must be confined to a limited number of people who appreciate what it means, take considerable time. Langford James is clear that start cannot be made until this material has been fully examined, and he knows precisely what it contains. . . . Already fresh evidence discovered will enable him to dispose with a good deal of evidence originally relied upon. . . . We feel there is considerable force in views of Langford James and that we cannot interfere with what he regards as essential preliminary work.³⁰

However, the Secretary of State was evidently getting uneasy with the growing criticism in England and informed the Viceroy on May 28:

Sincerely trust that Langford James is now in a position to start conspiracy case according to programme on 1st proximo or very soon after. Further delay is likely to provoke severe criticism in Assembly (or) Parliament.³¹

In spite of this desire on the part of the Government to start the case early, the preliminary enquiry did not begin till June 12—almost eleven weeks after the arrests. Meanwhile numerous applications for bail made on behalf of the accused, individually and collectively, were refused.³¹ One of the principal grounds advanced by the prosecution for rejecting bail applications and accepted by the Magistrate was that the case had been started by the Government of India after due care and therefore it was very likely that the accused were guilty.³²

The preliminary enquiry in the case commenced on June 12, 1929, before Mr. Milner White, Special Magistrate, at the District Court of Meerut. After the hearing on June 13, however, an adjournment of ten days was granted and the hearing was resumed on June 24 and continued till June 25. Meanwhile on June 19, 1929, the number of accused increased to thirty-two with the addition of Lester Hutchinson. The first four days of the trial (seventeen and one half hours) were totally occupied by

the opening address of the chief counsel for the prosecution, Mr. Langford James. This opening address was remarkable as the like of it is rarely heard in any court of justice. It was an attack on the theory of Marxism and Leninism, the policy and the Government of Soviet Russia, the Communist International and an attempt to show the anti-national character of the accused. Very little was said about how a "conspiracy" was afoot to "deprive the King of his sovereignty over British India."³²

Mr. Langford James emphasized the role of Moscow and the Third International in carrying on Communist propaganda in India. Giving a detailed description of the origin, objectives, organization, methods, and tactics of the Third International, he said that a large number of people connected with the Bolshevik movement had "indulged in ruthless bloodshed and a reign of terror" at the direction of the Third International. And according to the "programme of this body in Moscow violence, bloodshed and civil war and a reign of terror were unavoidable."³³

He also described at length the creed of the Communist Party as propounded by Marx and Engels—the theory of class war and the dictatorship of the proletariat. "These men advocated war between capitalists, or those who had a stake in the country," he said, "and the proletariat, or those who had no stake in the country. This was clear from the origin of the word proletariat." On Leninism he said:

Lenin had prescribed blood red revolution for overthrowing capitalism. He had declared it as the duty of all Communists everywhere to bring about an armed uprising, with the aid of peasants and workers. Lenin had preached this doctrine both before and after the Russian revolution.³⁴

Referring to the state of affairs in Russia under Bolshevism, he said:

A large number of people, when you mention Russia, connect it with bloodshed, a ruthless reign of terror. This contains the germs of truth. Bolshevism . . . I believe to be a festering sore on the face of Europe, a cruel and tyrannous autocracy masquerading under the mask of popular government.³⁵

In addition, the prosecution pointed out the relationship of vari-

ous Moscow-controlled and directed front agencies such as the Red International of Labour Unions, the National Minorities movement and the League Against Imperialism to the furtherance of Communism in India.³⁷

Besides stressing the subversive character of the Comintern to the entire non-Communist world, Chief Crown Counsel Mr. James also emphasized the view that the Communists in Russia harshly oppressed their own people,³⁸ and were bent on annihilating the social structure of India, notably the so-called national bourgeoisie.³⁹

Anticipating a defence argument to the effect that since there was technically no Indian Communist Party which was formally a branch of the Communist International and that therefore Indian Communists were not officially members of the Comintern, the Chief Prosecutor held that it was sufficient to show the Indian Communists were acting "at the behest of the Third International" to warrant the conviction of the Indian conspirators.⁴⁰

As to the charges against the accused themselves, Mr. James said:

The activities of the accused in India consisted in faithfully carrying out the Communist programme contained in Communist literature and books. Spratt had assisted the formation of the Workers' and Peasants' party in Bombay and thereafter the activities extended to other provinces. . . . The strikes in Bombay and Calcutta were instigated and carried on and prolonged by the accused and they were proud of it. They made vigorous efforts to capture the Trade Union Congress in 1927 and last year. They persistently adhered to the Moscow clique. They had newspapers everlastingly preaching the gospel of Communism and their activities consisted in poisoning the minds of the youths in the country by the formation of Youth Leagues. . . . The accused had engineered, taken part in and spoken at various kinds of demonstrations which were intended by the accused to educate the proletariat in order to initiate them into the mysteries of class war and dictatorship of the proletariat.⁴¹

A conscious effort was made on the part of the prosecutor to bring out the anti-national character of the Communists. Realizing that the seizure of the Indian redicals was unpopular, to say the least, among influential Indians, notably in Congress circles, Mr. James stressed those features of Communism which he felt were utterly distasteful to the Indian nationalists. He said:

The Indian National Congress was stigmatised as a misguided bourgeois body, which was to be captured or converted to the peculiar principles of the accused. Their [Communists'] opinions of some of the Nationalist leaders were:—

Pandit Motilal Nehru—A dangerous patriot.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru—A tepid reformist.

Mr. Subhas Chandra Bose—bourgeoisie and ludicrous careerist.

Mr. Gandhi—A grotesque reactionary.

Lala Lajpatrai—A scoundrel, and politically dangerous.

Mr. C. R. Das—A poltroon.

The quarrel which the accused had with men of Nationalist thought in India was that the latter's ideology was all hopelessly wrong.

Mr. Gandhi was charged with another crime by these people. He was religiously minded and there was no place for God in Communist ideals. . . .

Each of these accused is, I repeat, anti-nationalist.⁴²

He charged that the objective of the accused was "to remove the Government of His Majesty King George in India and in its place put the Government of the Third Communist International." Explaining further he said that the accused wanted to "substitute the Government of His Majesty by the Government of M. Stalin as he is now known."⁴³

Mr. James described the accused as Bolsheviks and according to him, a Bolshevik had certain characteristics:

To be a Bolshevik of an unimpeachable character you require certain definite qualifications to which an ordinary man does not aspire. You don't love your country, you are anti-country, you are anti-God, you are anti-family; in fact you are anti-everything which a normal man considers decent.⁴⁴

The defence was represented by a number of prominent Indian lawyers like K. F. Nariman, D. P. Sinha, M. C. Chagla, C. B. Gupta, K. C. Chakravarty and others.⁴⁶ The senior Defence Counsel, Mr. D. P. Sinha maintained that this was the first systematic prosecution by the Government of a group of men for holding certain ideals and cherishing certain beliefs even though their actions were not contrary to law. All trade unionists, he explained, believed that it was their elementary duty to make labour "class conscious" and to organize for collective bargaining. As for the allegation that the accused had attempted to deprive the King of his sovereignty, the Chief Counsel contended, that was no offence so long as the means employed were not illegal, and even if they were illegal the accused could only be tried for sedition and not for treasonable conspiracy.⁴⁶

Another defence attorney, Mr. K. C. Chakravarty argued that from the charges enumerated by the Prosecuting Counsel it seemed the Government was launching this case against the Soviet Government as much as against the thirty-two accused. Hence, he said, "the only law which applied to such a conspiracy case was the Law of Nations" and a "municipal tribunal" such as the District Court of Meerut had no true jurisdiction over the case.⁴⁷

All of the accused pleaded "not guilty" after the prosecution completed its presentation of the case, in the course of which they examined 320 witnesses and filed 12,500 exhibits (covering 7,000 printed pages).⁴⁸ Most of the defendants did not exercise their rights to cross-examine the witnesses for the prosecution, or make statements, or give evidence on their own behalf in court. Only three of the accused made specific statements in their own defence. Dr. Dharamvir Singh, a Member of the U.P. Legislative Council and the Vice-president of the U.P. Workers' and Peasants' party, pleaded "not guilty" on the plea that he had never been a Communist and as a follower of Gandhi was opposed to Communist objectives and methods.⁴⁹ A. A. Alve and S. H. Jhabwalla, explaining they had joined the WPP because they shared its objective of working for the amelioration of working conditions, denied that they were Communists. While Jhabwalla argued he was a "Parsee humanitarian," Alve claimed himself to be an "agriculturist and a labourer."⁵⁰

The first phase of the Meerut Conspiracy Case, the Magisterial Enquiry, ended on December 15, 1929, after lasting for about seven months. On January 13, 1930, thirty-one of the thirty-two accused were committed to trial by Mr. Milner White. All the prisoners except Mr. Dharamvir Singh were committed to be tried by the Court of Special Sessions, Meerut.⁵¹

The only one of the accused who was pronounced "not guilty" in the preliminary examination, was Dharamvir Singh, who was released after he submitted a written statement to the Court on November 26, 1929, saying:

I am not a Communist and never have been one. I have heard the description of communism put forward in this case and I have now looked at some of the books and I can say quite frankly that I do not agree with the object or the methods of the Communists. I am an ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi and believe firmly in non-violence ; and in practice I am a nationalist and propose to remain such. If I had the slightest idea that by attending the conference and writing to Dr. Mukerji I am helping the Workers' and Peasants' Party which is alleged to be a communist organisation, I would never have anything to do with those two things. As a matter of fact I had no idea of Workers' and Peasants' Party at all. I have always tried to do work among the farmers and labourers, but certainly not on communist lines, as I now understand them ; nor have I the slightest idea to do such work in the future on those lines.⁵²

The efforts of the accused to get the trial transferred to a presidency town where they could be tried by a jury was rejected. The first application in this respect was made to the Chief Justice at Allahabad on July 16, 1929. He rejected it saying that the trial was being conducted under conditions "most normal in this country", that he did not believe there was any inconvenience and that "everybody will settle down comfortably at Meerut."⁵³

The final application for transferral was moved on January 24, 1930 by Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru. He appealed to the Chief Justice of Allahabad High Court, on behalf of the thirty-one accused who were committed for trial to the Sessions Court, that their case should be transferred to Allahabad High Court and

their trial be held before a jury. On January 27, 1930, the Chief Justice dismissed the application and ordered the case to proceed in the Meerut Sessions Court.⁶⁴ In doing so he argued that "a jury might not take a judicial view." He further stated that he was not in favour of jury trial since a jury "would be asked to follow and to understand a very large number of documents . . . a super-human task to ask any member of the jury." Consequently, he concluded, "the only man who could give a fair and just decision on a matter of this kind was a single judge."⁶⁵

Thus the Meerut Conspiracy Case, launched with the arrests of thirty-one labour leaders on March 20, 1929, completed its first round of enquiry by the end of the year. Meanwhile, the thirty-one accused were continually refused bail and the defendants' attempts to transfer the venue of the case to get a jury trial had also failed. With this background the regular trial began in January, 1930, and dragged on until August, 1933.

A Brief Review of the Case and the Judgements

The second phase of the conspiracy case, the formal trial of the Indian Communists and their fellow-travellers, began before Judge R. L. Yorke and five Indian assessors in the Court of Special Session at Meerut on January 31, 1930.⁶⁶ The prosecution rested its case on March 17, 1931, after no fewer than 281 witnesses had been examined and 2,600 documents produced in evidence by the Government.⁶⁷ This was followed by the rendering of the formal statements of the prisoners and the presentation of the official defence of the accused. The trial reached its closing phase on June 16, 1932, when the Special Prosecutor for the Crown, Mr. M. I. Kemp,⁶⁸ delivered a long closing statement lasting almost two months. In conformity with Indian legal procedure, the Indian assessors rendered their verdicts on August 17, 1932, which had no binding force whatsoever. It is noteworthy, however, that they found most of the Communists guilty and the non-Communists not guilty.⁶⁹

After a delay of five months, the Sessions Judge R. L. Yorke, delivered his verdict on January 17, 1933, which was binding but subject to appeal to the High Court at Allahabad. Of the thirty-one accused, Shibnath Bannerjee, Kishorilal Ghosh, and

B. N. Mukherji—Bengali trade unionists who belonged to neither the WPP nor the CPI—were acquitted. D. R. Thengdi, president of the Bombay Workers' and Peasants' party, had died during the trial. The remaining twenty-seven persons were found guilty. The sentences were unusually severe. Muzaffar Ahmad was sentenced to transportation for life.⁶⁰ The others received the following terms: S. A. Dange, S. V. Ghate, K. N. Joglekar, R. S. Nimbkar, and Philip Spratt—twelve years; Benjamin Bradley, S. S. Mirajkar, and Shaukat Usmani—ten years; S. S. Josh, Abdul Majid, and Dharani Goswami—seven years; Ayodhya Prasad, Dr. G. M. Adhikari, P. C. Joshi and M. G. Desai—five years; Samsul Huda, A. A. Alve, G. R. Kasle, Gauri Shankar, and L. R. Kadam—three years; and Gopendra Chakravarty, Gopal Basak, Lester Hutchinson, R. R. Mitra, S. H. Jhabwalla, and K. N. Sehgal—four years.⁶¹

The unexpected severity of the sentences brought forth sharp criticism and comments from various quarters, both inside and outside India. All the convictions were appealed officially before the High Court of Judicature at Allahabad on July 24, 1933. The High Court rendered its verdict on August 13, 1933, and the sentences were reduced drastically.

The High Court Judgement divided the twenty-seven accused into four groups for convenience:

1. Members of the Communist Party of India.
2. Members of the Communist Party of Great Britain.
3. Those who were Communists by conviction but did not become members of the Communist Party of India.
4. Political workers belonging to either the Peasants' and Workers' Association or Trade Unions or the Congress, who deny that they have ever belonged to any Communist organisation or joined in any conspiracy.⁶²

The High Court ordered the sentences to be reduced as follows:⁶⁸

Name	Group placed in	Original Sentences	High Court Decision
Muzaffar Ahmad	1	Life transportation	3 years r.i.
S. A. Dange	1	12 years	3 " "
Shaukat Usmani	1	10 " "	3 " "
Philip Spratt	2	12 " "	2 " "
S. V. Ghate	1	12 " "	1 " "
K. N. Joglekar	1	12 " "	1 " "
R. S. Nimbkar	1	12 " "	1 " "
B. F. Bradley	2	10 " "	1 " "
S. S. Mirajkar	1	10 " "	1 " "
S. S. Josh	1	7 " "	1 " "
Abdul Majid	1	7 " "	1 " "
Dharani Goswami	3	7 " "	1 " "
Gopen Chakravarty	3	4 " r.i.	7 months "
Ajodhya Prasad	1	5 " transp.	Conviction upheld but released
P. C. Joshi	3	5 " "	"
Gopal Basak	3	4 " r.i.	"
G. M. Adhikari	1	5 " transp.	"
Samsul Huda	1	3 " r.i.	"
M. G. Desai	4	5 " transp.	Acquitted of all charges
S. H. Jhabwalla	4	4 " r.i.	"
H. L. Hutchinson	3	4 " "	"
R. R. Mitra	3	4 " "	"
K. N. Sehgal	4	4 " "	"
G. R. Kasle	4	3 " "	"
Gauri Shankar	4	3 " "	"
L. R. Kadam	4	3 " "	"
A. A. Alve	4	3 " "	"

Thus the sentences were reduced considerably. Hutchinson and eight others were completely acquitted. The High Court,

taking into consideration that the defendants had already been confined for more than four years, decided to be lenient. The sentences of Joshi, Basak, A. Prasad, Adhikari and Huda were reduced to the time they had already served and they were released immediately. The sentences passed against Brndley and nine others were reduced to one year and that of Chakravarty to seven months. The period of remission already earned by them was taken into consideration and all of them were released sometime in November, 1933. By the end of the year 1933, all the accused except Muzaffar Ahmad, Dange, Spratt, and Usmani had been released.¹⁴

Special Features of the Case

In many respects the Meerut Conspiracy Case stands out as a unique event in the history of British India. It was the longest state trial in that history, planned, carried out, and concluded under three different British Governments—Conservative, Labour, and National. The trial was conducted at an enormous financial cost at a time when the economy of the country could ill afford it. From a strict legal point of view also the case was unusual for its overt political tone. As the trial proceeded it was apparent that both the prosecutors and the defendants were using it for their respective political purposes. Moreover, the case attracted wide scale international attention mainly in the shape of criticism. Some of these notable features of the case will be discussed briefly in the following pages.

(a) The most significant feature of the case was its unusually long duration and cost. Formally the case was launched on March 20, 1929, with the arrests of the thirty-one accused and was finally concluded with the Appellate Court Judgement delivered on August 3, 1933. So the case lasted for almost four and a half years. A massive amount of documents were produced in evidence and numerous witnesses were examined in the course of the trial. Some idea of the huge scale on which the case was conducted can be had from the following extract from the Judgement of the Allahabad High Court:

The trial has become somewhat notorious on account of its unprecedented duration. All the accused persons,

except Hutchinson, were arrested in March, 1929 (Hutchinson was arrested in June of the same year) and have all this time, except for the period during which some of them were released on bail, been detained in jail. The trial commenced in the Court of the Committing Magistrate on a complaint filed on March 15, 1929, and a supplementary complaint filed against Hutchinson on June 11, 1929. The entire proceedings have now lasted for nearly four years and a half. This is accounted as follows:—

(1) The preliminary proceedings before the Magistrate took over seven months, resulting in the commitment of the accused to the Court of Sessions on January 14, 1930 ;

(2) In the Sessions Court the prosecution evidence took over 13 months ;

(3) The recording of the statements of the accused occupied over ten months ;

(4) The defence evidence lasted for about two months ;

(5) The arguments continued for over 4½ months ;

(6) The learned Sessions Judge took over five months thereafter to pronounce his judgement ;

(7) The last of the appeals was filed in the High Court on March 17, 1933, . . . July 24, 1933 was fixed for the appeals, on which date the arguments commenced, and having lasted for 8 working days were concluded yesterday (August 2, '33).

The case was conducted on a gigantic scale. The evidence consists of 25 printed volumes of folio size. There are altogether 3,500 prosecution exhibits, over 1500 defence exhibits, and no less than 320 witnesses were examined. The judgement itself is in two printed volumes covering 676 pages of folio size.⁶⁵

The trial was conducted at an enormous expense. Exactly what amount of money was spent on the case has never been declared anywhere. However, when the Sessions Court Judgement was delivered on January 16, 1933, it was officially estimated that the case had cost £126,000 or Rs. 16 lakhs up to that period.⁶⁶ By the end of the appeal the figure must have had increased and

one estimate is that the total cost to the prosecution was in the neighbourhood of £200,000.⁶⁷

(b) Another important feature of the case was that, being a conspiracy trial, it was conducted without a jury and for most part it was a trial where bail was refused to the majority of the prisoners for the full four and a half years that the case lasted.

The Government of India was determined to have the case tried without a jury⁶⁸ although only two of the thirty-two accused came from Meerut while fourteen of them came from Bombay and ten from Calcutta.⁶⁹ Moreover, twenty-four of the prisoners had never even been to Meerut before the trial. The accused had appealed four times to get the case transferred to Allahabad High Court where it could be tried by a jury, and each appeal was refused.⁷⁰ All this together with the fact that three British citizens among the thirty-two accused were also denied of a cherished British privilege to be tried by a jury, came under heavy criticism both in India and in England.

From the time of the arrests in March, 1929, up until April, 1931, all the prisoners were kept in close confinement in prison. In spite of the effect of this confinement upon the health of men who were still at that time entitled to be treated as innocent men, the Sessions Judge consistently refused to permit their release on bail. Eventually ten out of the thirty-one were allowed bail after April, 1931, by the Allahabad High Court, who declared, that in their opinion they should have been released long before.⁷¹ The rest of the twenty-one accused were refused bail in spite of several appeals and were kept in prison for the entire period of the trial. It might be of interest to note that the ten who were granted bail were all non-Communists. Referring to this fact a number of defendants in their Joint Statement to the Court stated:

A test application was made by two of us in April 1931, after the Delhi Pact had been signed and the political tension of the previous year had partially relaxed. Owing to this fact coupled with the carelessness of the Crown Counsel, and the circumstance that they were fortunate enough to argue before a relatively independent and liberal-minded bench, they were granted a conditional bail. This established a precedent and al-

most all the remaining accused applied also. Only four non-communist accused succeeded in this Court. When we appealed to the High Court, a full bench was carefully arranged to decide this important question. Their decision was prepared before they heard argument, as is shown by the fact that their judgement of several typed pages was ready a few minutes after they had retired for decision. The decision itself was extraordinary. All the non-communists accused except one . . . and including three who had not applied, were granted bail while all those of the accused who had declared themselves communists by conviction, whether the evidence proved their connection with the C.P.I., or not—were refused.⁷²

The fact that bail was refused to a majority of the prisoners for the trial's entire period of four and a half years indeed makes it an unusual instance of British justice in India.

(c) The Meerut trial was from the very beginning a political case. As the trial proceeded it assumed a propagandist character on both sides. This trend was set in motion by the Chief Prosecution Counsel, Mr. Langford James who vehemently attacked Communism, national and international, in the choicest phraseology, characterizing the Communists as enemies of civilized life. Throughout the trial the prosecution's attack was aimed chiefly at Moscow, the Communist International and the theory of Marxism and Leninism. In fact none of the accused was ever charged with committing any "overt act" of illegality or having committed any acts of violence in pursuance of the alleged conspiracy. This was expressed clearly in the Allahabad High Court Judgement in the following words:

It is conceded that the accused persons have not been charged with having done any overt illegal act in pursuance of the alleged conspiracy. . . . It is clear that if there was any offence committed in the nature of a conspiracy of a serious character, it was almost nipped in the bud. . . . All that they have done is to hold meetings, study the principles of Communism and probably also to make an attempt to disseminate the teachings which are said to be dangerous to society. . . .⁷³

The defendants in their turn seized the opportunity of the trial to make political speeches and propaganda statements from the court. Most of the accused, particularly the Communists among them, had decided to make such statements as would help to publicize the ideology and program of the Communist Party. To this end each of the accused delivered an individual statement of defence and a joint statement was issued by the Communists. As Muzaffar Ahmad recounted it later on:

As soon as we came together, we, the Communist accused, came to the decision that by making statements day after day we would transform the courtroom into a political forum for the dissemination of our ideology and [agreed] to equip ourselves for this mission by study beforehand. It was decided further that besides statements to be given individually by every accused, the Communist accused would make a General Statement.⁷⁴

This General Statement⁷⁵ is of particular interest because it embodied the Indian Communists' views on Marxism-Leninism and its applicability to the Indian scene, the nature of the Indian revolution and the role of the CPI in it, etc. In general, the Communists among the accused defended Marxism, proletarian internationalism, and admitted that they were Communists and had been members of the CPI.

Extracts from a few of the defendants' speeches are given below to show the propaganda character of their defence. S. A. Dange in his statement said:

The aim of the communists is the overthrow of imperialism and capitalism and the immediate aim of the communists in India is the overthrow of British imperialism. . . . The World Communist Party, that is the Communist International, is perhaps the most organised force of the working class of the oppressed peoples. An establishment of a new state suited to and for the quiet masses of workers and peasants will essentially mean the smashing up of the present state and the party of the working class can accomplish this.⁷⁶

Muzaffar Ahmad in his statement before the Sessions Judge, said:

I am a revolutionary communist—our Party fully be-

lieve in the policy, principle and programme of the Communist International and propagated them as best it could under the circumstances. . . . At present the British Imperialism is in control of state power in India. As the workers and peasants will overthrow imperialism they will naturally capture the state power, but they will not capture the power in order to maintain the state form as it is now. They will smash the present state form into pieces and establish in its place, the Workers' and Peasants' Republic based on the organ of the real mass power, the Soviet.⁷⁷

G. M. Adhikari in conclusion to his speech before the court declared:

The nature of the present case is such that the question of defending the individual does not arise. The question is to defend the Party, its ideology, its right to exist, its right to affiliate to and be assisted by the Communist International. If I have to deal with the Communist International at length . . . it is because the prosecution has made it the central figure in this case. . . . We as Communists feel it our duty to defend it before the Court and the public and place imperialism and capitalism on trial. The prosecution have hurled the vilest abuse on Communism, Communists and the Communist International. They have said that our crime is not merely against the State, but against society as a whole. I shall treat their abuse with the contempt it deserves, but hurl back the charge of being criminals against human society as a whole, in the teeth of the Imperialists and their highly-paid agents themselves. Who are the social criminals? I ask the blood thirsty imperialists who carried fire and sword through entire continents, who have instituted a colonial regime of blood and terror, who have reduced the toiling millions of these continents to abject poverty, intolerable slavery and are threatening them with mass extinction as a people ; or the Communists, who are out to mobilise the revolutionary energies of the toiling masses of the whole world and hurl it against this

wretched system based on ruthless oppression and brutal exploitation, smash it and create in its place a new one and thus save human society and its civilization from the catastrophe towards which it is undoubtedly heading? The official representatives of social criminals in this case are sitting on the prosecution benches.^{7x}

Similar statements were made by other accused as well.^{7y} It is quite apparent from the above that the Meerut Conspiracy Case became the platform for political propaganda and speech-making for both the British Government as well as the Communist defendants.

(d) Finally, the publicity given to and the wide ranging international attention received by the Meerut Conspiracy Case helped it to become an unparalleled event in Indian history. The major bulk of the comments on the case was sharply critical of the Government's action. Following the arrests of the thirty-one original accused in March, 1929, unrelenting criticism was expressed not only by the leftists and the Communists of England and Russia but even international celebrities like Professor Harold Laski, Albert Einstein, Romain Rolland and others publicized their unambiguous disapproval of the official measure.⁸⁰ The extraordinary length of the trial and the refusal on the part of the Judges to grant bail to the accused were also critically commented upon while the case was dragging on in Meerut.

The strongest reactions to the case, however, came after the Judgement of the Sessions Court was delivered on January 16, 1933. The severity of the sentences produced immediately a storm of protest in the Communist circles throughout the world. A writer in an official Comintern publication declared that "the sentences are savage."⁸¹ The response was by no means confined to India or the Communists alone, as it was perceived in England and elsewhere as well. The British left-wing exerted great pressure upon the Government to reduce the sentences. The National Joint Council of the British Trade Union Congress and the Labour Party issued a pamphlet stating that "the whole of the proceedings from beginning to end are utterly indefensible and constitute something in the nature of a judicial scandal."⁸² The India Office in London was flooded with protest resolutions from various

labour organizations in England and the Secretary of State had to face "uneasy moments" with critical questions from the Opposition in the House of Commons.⁸³ Speaking at a Parliamentary debate on the Meerut Case, Mr. Lunsbury (Labour) called the sentences "savagely severe" and commented:

These men [the twenty-seven convicted] were tried at Meerut so that the possible inconveniences of trial by jury might be avoided, and they had been in prison or on bail for four years. No net of conspiracy had been proved against them, and it was as though Englishmen were to be sent to gaol for being or being presumed to be members of the Communist Party. Sentences of three, four, and five years' rigorous imprisonment were passed for organizing strikes, and all around me are honourable members who had organized strikes and who ought to be in prison. . . .⁸⁴

The British press was also very critical as the *Daily Herald* (London) commenting on the "irregularity" of the trial described it as "one of the greatest judicial scandals in the history of the Empire."⁸⁵ The *Manchester Guardian* called the case "a long-drawn scandal of British justice in India", and further commented on the manner in which the trial was being conducted:

They [the accused] were refused a trial by jury. They were refused bail. They were kept in prison for nearly four years: the argument that it was their own obstructive methods which kept them there, is no more relevant than the similar argument used in the Sacco and Vanzetti case in the United States. The fact remains that a judicial system which allows prisoners to remain for years in an Indian gaol without a conviction is an anomaly which should be swept away. . . . It is claimed that they were guilty of sedition, but it is hard to resist the conclusion that they have been sentenced chiefly on the evidence of their being Communists. The actual proof of overt sedition alleged against them was weak; prosecuting counsel were forced to fill up the gaps in their cases with an academic analysis, and an equally academic denunciation, of what they declared Communism to stand for. Nor can anyone reading the

reports of the trial believe that the evidence of conspiracy between these men, as opposed to individual action, was other than extremely meager. What one can believe is that if the Indian authorities wished to give an unexampled advertisement of Communism in India this tortuous pursuit of young hotheads, with their chatter, their school-boy codes in secret ink, their reading parties poring piously over the works of Stalin, was the best way to set about it. To magnify the activities of such persons with a grandiloquent charge of subverting the "authority of the King Emperor" is chiefly evidence of a capacity to see spectres in the night.⁸⁰

Protests on the severity of the sentences were rendered by notable international figures like Dr. Albert Einstein and H. G. Wells.⁸⁷ Romain Rolland writing in 1933, described the Meerut sentences as "scandalous" and noted:

For four years, from June 1929 to January 1933, this process [of the trial] dragged itself out, under a mountain of paper, comprising more than 2,600 documents and tens and thousands of printed pages. The cost, stupidly in these times of economic ruin, amounted to more than £120,000 sterling. The sentences are of such revolting injustice that even the liberal opinion of moderate English people has been dismayed and is endeavouring to utter some timid protests. But it is necessary to arouse the opinion of the world ; for this trial is not merely the trial of 27 condemned persons ; it is the trial of the system of government which has passed judgement upon them.⁸⁸

Professor Harold J. Laski remarked:

The Meerut trial . . . is a grim incident in the history of British India. Men were torn from civil life for long years whose only crime was to carry out the ordinary work of trade union and political agitation after the fashion of everyday life in this country. Not merely socialist opinion in Great Britain recognized that it was a prosecution scandalous in its inception and disgraceful in its continuance. If the responsibility for undertaking

it lies at the door of a Tory Viceroy, that for its continuance belongs to a Socialist Secretary of State. . . . A government which acts in this fashion indicts itself. It acts in fear ; it operates by terror ; it is incapable of that magnanimity which is the condition for the exercise of justifiable power.⁹⁰

The pressure from the leftist and liberal opinion of England was obviously quite great upon the Government. This is evidenced from the Secretary of State's telegram of February 18, 1933, in which he informed the Viceroy:

I am somewhat exercised in my mind over severity of some of sentences passed in Meerut Case and I think it is right to let you know that there is a general feeling of uneasiness on the subject in various quarters here. I realise that it is difficult for Government to take any action in the matter at present stage when an appeal is pending but my difficulties here will not be made easier if there is delay in hearing appeal and possibly another six months elapse before matter is settled in court. You are no doubt alive to difficulty of position and I should be glad to learn your view on it.⁹¹

An American weekly the *Christian Century* (Chicago) commenting on the Meerut trial, wrote:

It is the longest and costliest state trial in India in recent years, the country having become poorer by Rs. 1,700,000 on this account. . . . A feature of the trial which has evoked much criticism is the judicial system in India which allows prisoners to remain for years in jail without conviction. Even British papers like the Times and the Manchester Guardian have commented on this and advocated that this procedure in the Indian criminal courts should be drastically changed. While the trial was going on questions were repeatedly asked in the British parliament drawing attention to this scandalous delay. Appeals were made to governments both in England and India by labour leaders and other political organizations to withdraw the prosecution. But all this was of no avail. Another effect of the trial and punishment of these

men has been the creation of an impression that the holding of certain political opinions which the authorities consider as wrong is punishable. These men no doubt held opinions similar to the objects of the communist international, but the evidence of overt acts of sedition in pursuance of these views is meager. . . .

This Meerut trial has again demonstrated that a very strong case exists for a radical reform in India of the substantive law in regard to offences against the state.⁶¹

It is reported that even President Roosevelt showed interest in the case. Muzaffar Ahmad wrote in 1966:

Prof. Harold Laski told Dr. Katju [Defence Counsel] in England that, when he had been in America, President Roosevelt, who had invited him to dinner, had raised the subject of the Meerut Conspiracy Case and had enquired why the Case was being protracted for such a long time. Prof. Laski also told Dr. Katju that he could use this information in his argument before the Court.⁶²

After the sentences were reduced drastically by the High Court on appeal the *Manchester Guardian* commented on August 4, 1933:

The drastic revision by the Court of Appeal of most of the Meerut sentences will be welcome news to all who have followed this four and a half years' trial. . . . In the first place, the fact that a proportion of no less than one-third of the defendants have had their trial sentences completely reversed on appeal is a startling commentary both on the earlier findings and on the wisdom of the Government of India's action in starting this prosecution at all. As to the remainder who are still found guilty, the Appeal Court's estimate of the seriousness of the offences is sufficiently indicated by its great reduction of the sentences imposed on them at the trial. Those who started this prosecution will get little satisfaction out of the result of the appeals. Here are nine men—and there are three others who were acquitted at the earlier stage—who, after being kept in the gaol for four years without bail, are now

adjudged to be innocent. If they should now raise a demand for compensation, will the Government be able, in equity or desire, to resist it? But how does one compensate a man for the loss of four years of his life? The only thing we can do—and we ought to do it—is to see that there is no repetition of such a blemish on British justice as the Meerut trial.⁹³

Similar comments were made by other British newspapers as well.⁹⁴

The entire Meerut Conspiracy Case received an extraordinary amount of international attention and no doubt it caused some embarrassment to the British Government who initiated it and allowed it to continue for four and a half years.

The distinctive features of the Meerut Conspiracy Case described in the above pages certainly make it plain why the case is considered a unique instance of a state trial in modern Indian history. It was the longest and the costliest trial of its kind. To a great extent the trial was shaped and designed by the Government of India for certain definite purposes. Bail was refused to the accused in order to keep what were considered to be the more "dangerous" and "troublesome" elements of the left-wing leaders out of the Indian political scene for as long a period as possible. Jury trial was disallowed so that the conviction of the accused would be made certain.⁹⁵ The line of argument followed by both the prosecution and the defence as well as the nature of the evidence produced and statement made on both sides would hardly be admissible in any ordinary British court of justice. Indeed, the political character of the case has no parallel in Indian history. Finally, considering the fact that none of the thirty-two accused enjoyed any international reputation or fame as Mahatma Gandhi or Jawaharlal Nehru did, the extraordinary amount of international attention which the case received puts it into a special category of historical significance.

CHAPTER V

Meerut Conspiracy Case: an Evaluation

THE period 1928-29 witnessed a crucial phase in the history of the development of the left-wing in India. In the previous chapters we have noted how and in what circumstances the Government of India had decided to take several steps in order to curb the growth of Communism in India. Among the specific measures deliberated in this connection, the most significant and serious one was the decision to institute a large scale conspiracy case against thirty-one (later increased to thirty-two) outstanding left-wing leaders in the contemporary Indian political scene, including three British citizens. Since the Meerut Conspiracy Case constituted a landmark in the history of Communist movement in India, and in the history of British rule in India, it is worthwhile to evaluate the effects and consequences of this important event. In order to do this, we shall look into the motives of the British Government in launching the case and then examine how far these purposes were satisfied eventually.

Motives for Combatting Communism in India

The decision to launch a full scale conspiracy trial against a large number of labour leaders was quite a drastic step. It was obvious that the Government had anticipated a fair amount of criticism of its actions both in India and in England if legal proceedings were undertaken. Moreover, as the correspondence between the Viceroy and the Secretary of State carried over this period on the subject indicates¹—the decision was made

after considerable deliberation. It will be, therefore, useful to ascertain some of the probable results that the Government expected to accomplish from this conspiracy case.

A few immediate objectives the Government sought were apparent, viz., (1) Removal from the scene of action of most of the effective and able leadership of left-wing movement just when they were operating most successfully. This was expected to cause serious damage to Communist manoeuvres in the country by undermining their organizational abilities. (2) With the threat of a coming civil disobedience movement, the Government was apprehensive that a situation would result in which anti-British sentiments would run high. It was considered dangerous if these men, some of whom had proved their excellence in organizing and inciting masses in a short span of time, were allowed to exploit the situation to further their own ends. So their removal from the scene was felt to be an absolute necessity. (3) The strikes and industrial disputes had created an atmosphere of hostility and anger between the businessmen and labourers in the country resulting in a stalemate in the economic front. The private businessmen, most of whom blamed the Communist trade unionists for the strikes and unrest, wanted the Government to take sterner steps than just proposing bills and legislation. Some amount of pressure was exerted from this circle upon the Government for immediate action against the Communists. Possibly, by the wholesale arrests, searches, and the trial, the Government wanted to pacify the business interests in India to a certain degree.

Apart from these short-range objectives, the Government most certainly expected some long-term effects to emerge from the case. First, from the official point of view, one of the most alarming symptoms in the prevailing atmosphere was the sympathetic attention that the Communists were receiving from the nationalist leaders as well as from the nationalist press in the country. The Assembly debates on the Public Safety Bill and the Trades Disputes Bill and the Indian press comments on them clearly indicated that the Communists were gaining favourable patronage from even some of the conservative nationalists, while of course, the more radical section of the Indian National Congress was openly co-operating with the Communists in their trade union and other activities. So it was expected that by

successfully executing a public trial the anti-national character and objectives of Communism and the Communist leaders would be brought out into the open which would hopefully deter nationalist opinion from empathising with Communist ideas.²

Second, apart from the nationalist press and the nationalist leaders' support, the Indian public in general had become more interested and attentive to the leftist notions of anti-imperialism and socio-economic freedom through revolution. The sudden surge of terrorism and political violence in different parts of the country created a very favourable atmosphere for the Communists to influence public opinion. Through an elaborate criminal proceeding it was believed that the real dangers to public welfare inherent in the principles and programmes of Communism would be exposed to the people. This, it was expected, would make it difficult for the Communists in future to exploit the anti-British and nationalist sentiments of the Indian people.³

Third, the trial was expected to help future judiciary proceedings in India. By a successful criminal prosecution the Government had aimed to create legal precedents by which Communist agents and leaders could be prosecuted on criminal charges more easily and more quickly in future.⁴

Fourth, the Government expected to gain greater executive powers from successful criminal proceedings against the leftists. A favourable judicial verdict would make it easier for the Government to proclaim necessary ordinances in future concerning similar situations, and if required, to disband at an early stage in their development, such organizations as the Government considered to be dangerous. In other words, as the Viceroy explicitly wrote to the Secretary of State on January 19, 1929:

It [a case against the Communists] would expose by means of a judicial pronouncement, which would not be questioned, the real aims and methods of the Communists. Thereafter it would possibly enable us to proceed to proclaim certain Communist associations, such as the Workers' and Peasants' Parties, under the Criminal Law Amendment Act, as unlawful associations on the authority of the findings of the Court.⁵

Finally, the chief objective of the Government was to suppress the growing but as yet young Communist movement in India.

The Meerut trial was anticipated to "nip the Movement in the bud." The Viceroy in his above-mentioned letter strongly recommended the launching of the case on the following grounds:

. . . Both on grounds of general policy and on practical considerations we should in the first place launch . . . a comprehensive conspiracy case against the leading Indian Communists ; before we consider taking any further legislative powers. . . . The existing organizations would be broken in such a case. . . . In our view it would indeed deal the whole Communist movement a more serious blow than any that could be expected from the taking of new special powers.⁶

These were the chief results which the Government presumably were hoping to achieve by instituting the Meerut Conspiracy Case against the prominent left-wing leaders of India.

Results Accomplished by the Meerut Conspiracy Case

The difficulty of dealing with intangible factors as are involved in explaining historical events notwithstanding, an attempt will be made to discuss the obvious question that appears from our present study: How far did the Meerut Conspiracy Case actually succeed or fail in achieving the Government's desired ends? In other words, did the Government of India in fact benefit or lose from running the trial? In order to answer this question it is necessary to go beyond the time span of this study to a few years following 1929 to grasp the full significance of the results of the trial.

It was found in examining the motives for launching the case in the first place, that there were generally speaking two categories of results that the Government of India had expected to achieve from this proceeding: certain short-term and some long-term objectives. As far as the short-term objectives of the Government were concerned it can be fairly stated that they were more or less fulfilled by the trial. (1) The sudden and simultaneous removal of almost the entire experienced and efficient leadership proved to be disastrous for the Communist activities in India during the period immediately following March, 1929. With most of its leaders in jail, the WPP became inoperative.

The remaining Communists were soon divided into a number of quarrelsome factions, and burdened with an unwise Comintern policy, floundered hopelessly and by their actions rapidly dissipated the good feeling towards their party generated by the trial. The Communists themselves apparently subscribed to this view as well since a self-analytical note prepared by the CPI later admitted that Meerut smashed the crude beginnings of the CPI and wiped away the entire all-India leadership.⁷ (2) From the Government's view-point, the situation in the industrial labour front improved to a great extent as well. In short, merely the absence of the first-ranking leadership from the political scene was a blow to the whole working class movement in India. This view was later corroborated by the Director of Intelligence Bureau's report of 1935:

. . . The removal of the thirty leading Communist agitators from the political arena was immediately followed by a marked improvement in the industrial situation. There can be no doubt whatsoever that the arrests . . . placed the authorities in a commanding position and created a vacuum in the leadership of the trade union movement which was filled by very inferior material.⁸

The split in the trade union movement and the mistakes committed by the new and inexperienced leadership led to a decrease in the number of strikes and industrial disputes as the following table will show:

Table 1: Industrial Disputes in India, 1928-32^a

Year	No. of Disputes	No. of workers involved	No. of working days lost
1928	203	506,851	31,647,404
1929	141	532,016	12,165,691
1930	148	196,301	2,261,731
1931	166	203,008	2,408,123
1932	118	128,099	1,922,437

What is more important is the fact that only forty-nine per cent. of the strikes were even partially successful in 1929.¹⁰ In 1930, thirty-nine, and in 1931 only thirty per cent. of all strikes succeeded.¹¹ (3) The Government was also successful in their bid to keep the "dangernus" groups of Communists away from the Indian political theater in 1930 when the civil disobedience movement was being successfully conducted under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi. The Indian authorities later in their official reports expressed satisfaction over the fact that the case had removed veteran Communists and trade unionists at a very critical juncture in India's history, and that if they had been free in 1930 and the succeeding years they would probably have made common cause with the Congress civil disobedience movement.¹²

These were all results which were favourable to the Government of India in the period immediately following March, 1929. In long-range perspective, however, the Meerut trial appears to have worked less to the advantage of the Government than to that of the Communists.

First, although persistent attempts were made by the Government prosecutors to neutralize the strong nationalist sympathies which were generated in the wake of the Meerut arrests, in all practical purposes, these Government efforts proved to be futile. The publicity given to the anti-national feelings of the Communists and to the adverse comments made by the accused and other international Communist figures about notable Indian nationalist leaders, evidently did not have the desired effects either on the nationalist leaders themselves or on the nationalist press as is proved by the absence of any negative reactions from those quarters. It would be fair to state that the Government's action against the Communists was generally interpreted as yet another act of repression by the British Imperialists against the Indians, and was not viewed separately as an action against the "Communists." Moreover, the Communist views on nationalism and the nationalist leaders were not secret and on many occasions the accused had openly expressed their mistrust and suspicions about the Indian leaders.¹³

Second, the Meerut Conspiracy Case instead of making Communism unpopular, had in fact the reverse effect. The general public who had very vague notions, if any, of Communism be-

fore, were suddenly confronted with a situation where the Meerut trial was making headline news every day. The publicity surrounding the trial and the prominence of the personalities assisting in the defence offered rare propaganda opportunities, of which the Communists took full advantage. They were making ideological appeals against British Imperialism and propagating revolutionary ideas for the cause of socialism in the name of economic justice and political emancipation. In fact, because of all the publicity the Party received, large numbers of radical youth were attracted to Communism.¹⁴ As Philip Spratt recalls:

On the whole the revelation of our secret methods caused people to admire us: we had done what most young men wanted to do, and but for the Mahatma would have done. We had denounced the Congress leaders, but so had a great many other people—the youth leagues, the terrorists, the independence group of Jawaharlal and Subhas, and the Congress left who soon after formed the Socialist Party. We had our opportunity in the sessions court to make political statements, and these were widely published in the press. Several of them were long enough to make a short book, and altogether no doubt most of what can be said in favour of communism was said.¹⁵

Third, the Meerut Conspiracy Case did create a legal precedent in ruling that the Communists were in fact engaging in a conspiracy against the King in India, thereby making it easier for the Government to proscribe future Communist activities in the country. However, even in this respect, the advantage was definitely curtailed to some extent by the relatively mild judgement of the Appellate Court and the reversal of the sentences there. The Intelligence Bureau was quite unhappy with the Allahabad High Court judgement as is evident from the following comment of Sir David Petrie:

The tragedy of the case has been the whittling down of the sentences. The Judges seem to say all the right things and do all the wrong ones. Their prime mistake (and it was probably due to lack of knowledge) was the assumption that the conspiracy had no immediate power for mischief. . . . It is a mistake that may

cost the Government and the country dear in future.¹⁶ However, in 1934, the verdicts of the Criminal Court were indeed used as the basis for declaring the CPI an unlawful association in India, the Government's fourth long-range objective.

Finally, the main objective of the Government of India in instituting the Meerut Conspiracy Case was to destroy the Communist movement in India. However, it can be asserted that this objective was not achieved by the case. As noted earlier, the trial provided an ideal platform for the Communists to preach their ideology from and the resurgence of Communist activities after 1933 suggested that instead of ending Communism, the Meerut trial helped to establish it on a much more organized and cohesive form. The various reports of the Home Department, Government of India, and the Intelligence Bureau in the post-1933 period substantiate this view. For example, the police report of May, 1934, stated:

After the Meerut Conspiracy Case, interest in Communism seemed to have practically subsided, but towards the end of last year, there was a sudden revival of interest and activity. One of the chief reasons for this was no doubt the release of most of the Meerut Conspiracy Case prisoners, two of whom returned to England.¹⁷

In the period following the release of the Meerut prisoners, once again strikes and industrial disputes became common in India. As the above-mentioned police report indicated:

One of the most deplorable results of the spread of communist doctrines has been the unrest it has created among labour circles generally. . . . A series of labour disputes materialized between the beginning of March and the end of June, most of which were mainly due to the communist propaganda. The strike in Sholapur was serious. In addition, strikes of a less serious nature took place in Ahmedabad, Ajmeer, Cawnpore and Calcutta; and in several other places there was good deal of agitation. The worst of these, however, was the general strike among the textile workers in Bombay, which began as planned, on the 23rd April. It completely paralyzed the Bombay Mill industry, and extended also

to the mills in certain other towns, notably Nagpur and Delhi.¹⁸

Thus the Communist activities in India instead of dying out became once more so effective that in July, 1934, the Government of India had to declare the CPI, its Committees, Sub-committees and Branches to be unlawful associations under the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1908.¹⁹

Prominent Indian Communists consider the Meerut trial as largely responsible for the growth and development of future Communist movement in the country. Saumyendranath Tagore, a well-known Indian Communist at that time, has said and Philip Spratt agrees, that the Meerut case "placed Communism on a sure footing in India."²⁰ Muzaffar Ahmad writing more recently on the Meerut trial commented:

The British Government wanted to wipe the Communists out of the Indian soil by means of this Trial. However, in reality, Communist ideology was propagated country-wide through this Trial. As a result of this, the Communist Party of India was able to establish itself on a stronger foundation.²¹

However, judging from the post-Meerut development of Communism in India it is difficult to assess how far exactly the Meerut Conspiracy Case alone had contributed to its growth, although it is almost certain that the case did not put an end to Communism in India—not even temporarily. It can at least be said, the Meerut trial made martyrs out of the Communists, and martyrs are especially important in Indian political life. As Professor Harold Laski wrote:

The Meerut trial belongs to the class of cases of which the Mooney trial and the Sacco-Vanzetti trial in America, the Dreyfus trial in France, the Reichstag Fire trial in Germany, are the supreme instances.²²

Concluding Remarks

The Meerut Conspiracy Case reviewed in the context of events of 1928-29 appears to have been a reaction on the part of the British Government against what they considered to be a "grave and dangerous" threat of Communism. There is no doubt

that certain amount of left-wing activities were very successfully carried out in the labour front as well as in the national political front in India during the period. But to term this general trend towards leftism and socialism as genuine "Communism" is to exaggerate. In fact, contemporary press reports and the writings and speeches of the notable left-wing leaders, all tend to emphasize the point that "Communism", "Marxism", "Leninism" were understood by very few even among the hard-core Communist Party members. The Communist terminologies and phrases were often used quite indiscriminately by nationalists, terrorists, and sometimes even religious reformers to suit their respective purposes. "Communism" as a distinct ideology and political principle was almost non-existent in India during the period under consideration. It was diffused with the notions of nationalism, economic and social justice, and anti-imperialism in the common mind. As Philip Spratt observed:

The Communist Party of India was formed in 1925, but of the later communists only Ghatge took part in the founding meeting. The rest did not know what a communist party is and did not try to organise it or carry on its work. I remember that [R. P.] Dutt was not sure whether to be amused or suspicious about it. When I arrived there were fifteen or twenty nominal members.²³

Under these circumstances, it seems that the various legislative measures undertaken by the Government in 1928-29 would have been sufficient to deal with the left-wing situation in India for that period. The massive trial conducted at an enormous cost in terms of time, money, and international embarrassment for the British Government perhaps proved to be too expensive. In the final balance sheet, the whole operation appears heavier on the debit side than on the credit side for the Government.

Moreover, it is worthwhile to point out an important omission on the part of the Government in dealing with the situation of India in 1928-29. The whole left-wing situation in India was marked by a growing discontent in the economic front. The economic situation in India during 1927-28 period was dismal. This was particularly true in the industrial centers where the industrial labourers lived genuinely under an "oppressive" economic atmos-

phere. Surprisingly little attention was devoted by the Government to understanding the poor living and working conditions or the hardships endured by the workers and peasants of India during the period. Even less was done to alleviate the situation, although this condition was largely responsible for most of the success of the left-wing movement in India over the said period. It was easy for the Communists, the trade unionists, and the socialists, to gather support from the workers, the peasants, and the common men living under these trying economic conditions.

In 1927, A. A. Purcell and J. Hallsworth visited India as delegates of the British Trade Union Congress and in 1928 published their findings in the form of a report entitled, *Report on Labour Conditions in India*, giving a graphic picture of the life of the Indian labourers.

It is undeniable that the Indian workers are half starved and badly clothed, as well as horribly housed. There is no justification whatever for this state of affairs, yet, as far as we can judge, it would appear to be definite policy of the employing class in India to stabilise poverty on a permanent basis. The Indian workers should be encouraged to make the strongest possible stand against such an inhuman policy.²¹

The above-mentioned report as well as the later findings of the Royal Commission on Labour in India gave vivid descriptions of poor housing and health conditions, and the unbelievably low wages the workers earned.²² So considering the economic conditions of the working class, the large number of strikes and working class unrest of the period were not just political manoeuvres nor were they totally unjustified. As the Royal Commission on Labour in India noted in 1931:

The leading industries were yielding phenomenal profits, but wages lagged behind prices, and labour, so far from participating in the unprecedented prosperity, often found conditions harder than before. The world-wide uprising of labour consciousness extended to India, where for the first time the mass of industrial workers awoke to their disabilities, particularly in the matter of wages and hours and to the possibility of combination.²³

Unfortunately, the Government of India in their excessive concern about the political implication of the strikes and growth of Communism showed remarkable indifference to the economic causes which were to a great extent responsible for causing disruption in the political and economic front of India during 1928-29.

In conclusion, two incidents of interest might be pointed out in the context of the present study. These may be characterized as "historical ifs". Any historical study comes across some incidents which could or might possibly have influenced the outcome of events and remain as controversial suggestions at best. Whether they really had any significant potentiality or not naturally remains a matter of conjecture. However, to a student of history, they might be of some interest to note.

The first of these incidents occurred in connection with the Public Safety Bill. In the discussion of British official policies during 1928 to deal with the Communist situation in India, it was noted that the Public Safety Bill was at first considered the most important measure. It was only after the Bill had failed to get through in the Legislative Assembly that the idea of a conspiracy case, a more drastic step, was conceived of and developed. The circumstances under which the bill was defeated in the Assembly in September, 1928, were curious. It may be recalled that when the bill was voted upon, there was a tie (sixty-one to sixty-one) and the President of the Assembly, Mr. Vithalbhai Patel, with his casting vote decided the issue against the bill. However, one of the European members of the Assembly was a few minutes late in arriving for the session and so was not allowed to vote on the issue.²⁷ Thus the question lingers, if he had voted, the bill would have passed and considering the Secretary of State's great reluctance about approving the scheme of a conspiracy trial entailing the publicity and criticism—it might be speculated that if the bill had passed at that time, there would have been no Meerut Conspiracy Case at all.

The second event worth mentioning is the possibility of Jawaharlal Nehru's becoming involved in the case. Prior to the launching of the Meerut arrests, Jawaharlal Nehru was one of the leading figures in the left front of India. He occupied a conspicuous position and was repeatedly mentioned in the various

police reports on Communism in India for that period. He was definitely not at that time beyond suspicion with regard to the Meerut Conspiracy Case. His visit to Moscow in 1927 and his unqualified praise for the Soviet Union, his active role in India's participation in the workings of the League Against Imperialism, and his leading stature in the growing youth movement of India, steering it to a radical and socialist path, had engendered a great deal of suspicion towards him on the part of the British authorities.²⁸ This suspicion was all the more emphasized during the course of the trial when one of the exhibits was revealed as a letter from the CPI to Jawaharlal Nehru which stated:

If you are organisationally prepared, you will be able to strike a blow just as Gandhi was able to do in 1921. But I hope that this time there will be no sentimental nonsense about the shedding of a few litres of blood and that the revolutionary movement will be on purely materialistic lines.²⁹

Indeed, at one time, the prosecution had actually called on him to produce other letters written to him by the Communists; however, he was able to escape interrogation by the Crown counsel.³⁰

So it is safe to surmise that events came very close to having Jawaharlal Nehru also being accused as one of the "dangerous" elements responsible for the spread of Communism in India. Now, if Jawaharlal Nehru had been included among the Communists, what shape would the trial have taken? It is doubtful whether the trial would have dragged on for as long as it did. It is also difficult to imagine that with Jawaharlal Nehru as one of the accused, the Indian National Congress would have remained as passive and indifferent as they actually were towards the trial and the Meerut prisoners. It is quite probable, on the other hand, that more influential leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Motilal Nehru, and many more prominent British citizens would have demanded a fairer trial under better conditions—possibly with a jury and bail for the accused. And the results of a shorter and briefer trial might have been even less advantageous to the Government than those they actually achieved.

ENDNOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (New York, 1970), p. 403.

CHAPTER I

1. R. K. Das, *The Labour Movement in India* (Berlin, 1923), p. 45 which reads:
"The fundamental cause of the labour movement was the presence of women and children in factories and the main object of the first period was the regulation of child and woman labour."
2. Shachi Ram Gurtu, *Jagjivan Ram on Labor Problems* (Delhi, 1951), p. 38.
3. There are several studies which give good summaries of developments of labour organizations in India during this period upto World War I. See: *Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India* (London, 1931), pp. 316-326; R. K. Das, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-20; B. Shivan Rao, *The Industrial Worker in India* (London, 1939), pp. 13-19; V. B. Karnik, *Indian Trade Unions: A Survey* (Bombay, 1960), pp. 1-24; G. K. Sharma, *Labour Movement in India (Its Past and Present)* (Jullundur, 1963), pp. 47-70; D. H. Buchanan, *The Development of Capitalistic Enterprise in India* (New York, 1934), pp. 416-426; etc.
4. The psychological change which the War brought about among Indian labourers has been discussed by B. Shivan Rao in the following words:
"Before the war the superiority of the white man was unquestioned and seemed unquestionable. But the war almost completely destroyed that notion; a sense of equality came almost fiercely into prominence. There was the thrill of a new experience for the humble worker in a factory, accustomed to be docile and bear harsh treatment and kicks without a protest, to register a complaint against his European superior in a law court of assault. It was not just the vindication of a human right: it was even more—the assertion of racial equality."
5. *Report of the Royal Commission on Labour*, p. 333.
6. Agitation, strikes and terrorism flourished more than at any other time. See S. D. Punekar, *Trade Unionism in India* (Bombay, 1948).

- p. 67, who reports a total of 158,000 workers involved in strikes in 1919 and 457,000 in 1920.
7. In April, 1918, B. P. Wadia formed a trade union in Madras, and in the same year, Bombay saw the emergence of the Indinn Seamen's Union. The G.I.P. Railwaymen's Union came into existence in 1919, the Ahmedabad Textile Workers' Union in 1920. For a systematic study of the early trade union movement in India, see: S. D. Punekar, *Trade Unionism in India*, pp. 78ff. N. M. Joshi, *Trade Union Movement in India* (Bombay, 1927), Shiva Rao, *Industrial Worker in India*, pp. 149-177. R. Palme Dutt, *India Today*, 2nd ed., (Calcutta, 1970), pp. 402-409. D. R. Gadgil, *The Industrial Evolution of India in Recent Times*, 4th ed., (London, 1942), pp. 296-309. Karnik, *Indian Trade Unions*, pp. 13-32.
 8. For an excellent account of the relationship of the Indian left-wing with the British labour, see Partha Sarathi Gupta, "British Labour and the Indian Left, 1919-1939," in B. R. Nanda, ed., *Socialism in India* (Delhi, 1972), pp. 69-121.
 9. Poet Nazrul Islam wrote his *Byathar Dan* in 1919; A. K. Fazlul Huq and Muzaffar Ahmad published the Bengali paper *Nabayug* in 1920, and S. A. Dange wrote *Gandhi and Lenin* in 1921.
 10. For accounts of the formation of the CPI abroad, see Muzaffar Ahmad, *Amar Jiban O Bharater Communist Party, 1920-1929*, 2nd ed., (Calcutta, 1971), pp. 23-48; G. D. Overstreet and M. Windmiller, *Communism in India* (Berkeley, 1959), pp. 19-43. A valuable account is found in Government of India, Home Department, *Communism in India, 1919-1924*, a confidential report by Sir Cecil B. Kaye, Director, Intelligence Bureau (Simla, 1925).
 11. Overstreet and Windmiller, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-34; also, J. P. Hnitcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India: M. N. Roy and Comintern Policy, 1920-1939* (Princeton, N. J., 1971), pp. 11-19.
 12. This topic has been dealt with in detail by L. P. Sinha, *The Left-Wing in India, 1919-1947* (Muzaffarpur, 1965), pp. 278-293.
 13. R. K. Das, *Labour Movement in India*, pp. 30-40; also International Labour Organizations, *Industrial Labour in India: Studies and Reports of I.L.O.* (Geneva, 1938), p. 123.
 14. At the session the number of unions affiliated to the AITUC was sixty-four with a membership of 140,854. Forty-three other unions had expressed their sympathy and promised support but did not affiliate. See, K. B. Panikkar, *An Outline of the History of the A.I.T.U.C.* (New Delhi, 1959), pp. 3-4.
 15. In February, 1923, M. N. Roy established a Labour Information Bureau in Berlin for the purpose of providing a legal channel of communication between Indian and European labour organizations. After the formation of the AITUC Roy urged British Communists to secure the cooperation of S. Saklatvala, the Indian Communist

- M.P., and also a dominant figure in the Workers Welfare League. See, Haithcox, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
16. K. S. Bhatt, "The Workers' Welfare League in India," *Labour Monthly* (London), XIII, 12, 1931, pp. 777-779; the author was the president of the League. See also, Government of India, Home Department, *Communism in India, 1924-1927* (Calcutta, 1927), pp. 34, 58, 231, 235-236. This confidential document was prepared under the supervision of Sir David Petrie, Director, Intelligence Bureau, Government of India. He had updated Cecil B. Kaye's earlier account of Communist activities in India (1919-24) up until September, 1927.
 17. The Kanpur Bolshevik Conspiracy Case was launched by the British Government against militant trade unionism and growing Communism in India during 1924. The trial began in April against Muzaffar Ahmad, S. A. Dange, Shaikat Usmani and Nalini Das Gupta. M. N. Roy and R. L. Sharma had also been named in the original indictment, but since they were not in a country under British jurisdiction, they could not be apprehended. All were charged with conspiracy to organize a revolutionary organization for the purpose of overthrowing British rule in India. The four defendants were found guilty and sentenced to four years' imprisonment on May 20, 1924. Nalini Das Gupta and Muzaffar Ahmad were released from prison in 1925 because of illness and Shaikat Usmani was released in September, 1927. Dange, however, was let out a few months earlier on May 24, 1927. For more information see Government of India, Home Department, *Communism in India, 1919-1924*, (Calcutta, 1924) by Sir Cecil Kaye and also *Communism in India, 1924-1927*, (Calcutta, 1927) by Sir David Petrie. Also, Nripendra Nath Mitra, ed., *Indian Annual Register* (Calcutta, 1924), 1924, I, pp. 67-68; Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*, pp. 67-68.
 18. Government of India, J. Coatman, ed., *India in 1927-28* (Calcutta, 1929), pp. 341-342.
 19. *Reports of I.L.O.*, p. 126; see also R. P. Dutt, *India Today*, p. 409; and A. S. Mathur and J. S. Mathur, *Trade Union Movement in India* (Allahabad, 1957), p. 27.
 20. *Reports of the I.L.O.*, p. 126; and Mathur & Mathur, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
 21. The CPGB was founded in 1920 and one of its founding members was R. P. Dutt. See, Philip Spratt, *Blowing up India* (Calcutta, 1955), p. 24. See also Henry Pelling, "The Early History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-29," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (London), VIII (1958), pp. 45-46. The Red International of Labour Unions, otherwise known as "Profintern," was set up by the Comintern in July, 1921, to further Communist cause in international trade union field. See E. H.

Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923* (London, 1953), pp. 399-401.

The League against Imperialism will be discussed below in fn. 94. The Welfare League of India has been referred to above. The Labour Research Department was an information service maintained in London by a number of trade unions to collect and disseminate economic data. It was infiltrated by British Communists who used it as a cover and an agency for carrying out propaganda. See Spratt, *Blowing up India*, p. 22.

22. "Communist plotting in India," *The Times* (London), January 18, 1933, p. 9. This is a summary of the decision of the Sessions Judge, R. L. Yorke, at the Meerut Conspiracy trial.
23. Government of India, Home Department, *Communism in India, 1924-1927*, pp. 10-11.
24. Glading came to India with credentials from M. N. Roy and while in India, he helped organize a labour party with the noted Indian nationalist Lala Lajpat Rai as president. The party proved abortive and on his return to England, Glading presented an unfavourable report on the progress of Communism in India. Government of India, Home Department, *Communism in India, 1924-1927*, pp. 137-138.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57, 73. See also, Spratt, *Blowing up India*, p. 32.
26. Spratt, *Blowing up India*, p. 29.
27. Government of India, Home Department, *Communism in India, 1924-1927*, p. 145.
28. Karnik, *Indian Trade Unions*, p. 35; also M. R. Masani, *The Communist Party of India* (London, 1954), pp. 25, 45.
29. Charles A. Myers, *Labour Problems in the Industrialization of India* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), p. 60. Gandhi did not like the political emphasis given to trade unionism and was also dissatisfied with the quality of labour leadership. See, *Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, 4th ed., (Madras, 1933), p. 1047, where he criticizes "labour leaders who consider that strikes may be engineered for political purposes."
30. Karnik, *Indian Trade Unions*, p. 38.
31. *Report of the Royal Commission*, pp. 318-319.
32. *India in 1928-29*, p. 7.
33. D. H. Buchanan, *Development of Capitalist Enterprise*, p. 428, quoting *Bombay Labour Gazette*, May, 1934, p. 690. See also *Report of the Royal Commission*, p. 333.
34. For a report on the strike, see, *India in 1928-29*, pp. 9-10. An excellent in-depth study of the subject has been done by M. D. Morris, *The Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force in India: A Study of the Bombay Cotton Mills, 1854-1947* (Berkeley, 1965). A leftist view of the cotton mill strikes can be found in B. F. Bradley, *Trade Unionism in India* (London, 1932), pp. 46-56.

35. The "rationalisation scheme" was briefly as follows: to "get the spinner who was up to then working only one side to work two sides, and the weavers who had only been working two looms up to this time to work on three looms; of course this does not go into detail of the different departments. In the first place the new scheme was introduced on an optional basis, and then made compulsory, the workers who would not work it being sacked." (Bradley, *Trade Unionism in India*, pp. 47-48.)
36. The growth of Communist influence among the cotton mill workers of Bombay leading to the formation of the GKU has been reported in various official sources. See, Government of India, Intelligence Bureau's "fortnightly report on the political situation for April, 1928", on Labour Movement. National Archives of India (N.A.I.), Home/Pol/1928 F. 1/28.
The intelligence report entitled "Events and Developments in the Communist Situation in India from September 1928 to January 1929" gives detailed development of the Bombay trade union picture. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1928/ F. 18/VII K.WXI.
The left-wing view is given by Bradley, *Trade Unionism*, pp. 52-54.
37. *Reports of I.L.O.*, p. 385; R. P. Dutt, *India Today*, p. 357.
38. Meerut, District Court, *Judgement Delivered by R. L. Yorke* (Simla, 1932-33), I, pp. 249-256.
39. *Report of the Royal Commission*, p. 309.
40. Government of India, Home Department, *Communism in India*, (revised up to January, 1935), (Simla, 1935), p. 126. This report was prepared by J. F. Cowgill under the direction of H. Williamson, Director, Intelligence Bureau.
41. R. P. Dutt, *India Today*, p. 413.
42. *Report of the Royal Commission*, pp. 104-105.
43. S. D. Punekar, *Trade Unionism in India*, p. 326.
44. Government of India, Home Department, *Communism in India*, rev. up to 1935, p. 126.
45. *Report of the Royal Commission*, p. 335.
46. The 9th session of the AITUC was attended by I. W. Johnstone as representative of the League against Imperialism and J. F. Ryan, an Australian, who represented the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat. For more details, see *Indian Annual Register*, 1928, II, p. 501.
47. *Indian Annual Register*, 1928, II, pp. 503-504. See also *All India Trade Union Bulletin* (Bombay), V, 7-11; 1929, pp. 65-68.
48. Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography* (Bombay, 1962), pp. 186-187.
49. Karnik, *Indian Trade Unions*, p. 38; also Nehru, *Autobiography*, p. 187.
50. *Indian Annual Register*, 1928, II, p. 504; also *AITU Bulletin* (Bombay), V, 7-11; 1929, pp. 70-81.
51. *Ibid.*

52. Government of India, Home Department, *Communism in India*, rev. up to 1935, p. 119.
53. Government of India, Home Department, *Communism in India, 1924-1927*, pp. 13, 17-20, 25.
54. Spratt, *Blowing up India*, p. 29.
55. The Labour Swarnj Party was founded by the revolutionary Bengali poet Quazi Nazrul Islam, Hemanta Kumar Sarkar, and others. In February, 1927, the party's name was changed to the Peasants' and Workers' Party of Bengal, and in March, 1928, it was changed once again to that of the Workers' and Peasants' Party of Bengal. Muzaffar Ahmad, *Communist Party of India: Years of Formation, 1921-1933* (Calcutta, 1962), pp. 22-23.
56. *Lungal* was published between December 16, 1925 and April 15, 1926, when it ceased publication for financial reasons. It reappeared in August under the name *Ganarant*. In addition, for some time, a Bengali weekly *Jagaran* was published in Bengal which supported the party. Muzaffar Ahmad has given a vivid description of the formation, activities and directives of the party in an article written in Bengali entitled, "Krishak o Sramik Dal" in his *Samakaler Katha* (Calcutta, 1963), pp. 80-92.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 92; also Muzaffar Ahmad, *Amar Jiban*, p. 411. The Intelligence Bureau, Government of India, submitted a detailed report on the book. See, "A review of the Book 'A Call to Action'—published by the Workers' and Peasants' Party of Bengal, 2/1 European Asylum Lane, Calcutta—1928." N.A.I., Home/Pol/1928 F. 18/VII K.W.VIII.
58. Government of India, Home Department, *Communism in India, 1924-1927*, p. 73.
59. Karnik, *Indian Trade Unions*, pp. 35-36.
60. A complete report on the proceedings of the Punjab Workers' and Peasants' Party Conference is given by the Intelligence Bureau's report for the period "September 1928 to January 1929." N.A.I., Home/Pol/1928 F. 18/VII K.W.XI.
61. *Ibid.* The same report also dealt with the United Provinces Workers' and Peasants' Party Conference of October, 1928.
62. Spratt, *Blowing up India*, p. 44.
63. Muzaffar Ahmad's Bengali article on the Workers' and Peasants' Party in *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47.
64. This document later became famous as the "Assembly Letter" after passages from it were read out in the Legislative Assembly on September 10, 1928, during the debate over the Public Safety Bill. Detailed quotations from this letter appeared in *The Times* (London), September 25, 1928 and in *Statesman* (Calcutta), August 18, 1928. The references from the letter in this paragraph are taken from these sources. The entire text of the letter can be found in N.A.I., Home/Pol F. 190/28.

65. *Ibid.*
66. Banners and slogans at the conference carried the following: "We want nothing but complete independence," "Let land be divided among the cultivators," "Down with Imperialism," "Down with bourgeois nationalist hypocrisy," etc. (*The Tribune* (Lahore), December 23, 1928, p. 9.)
67. "The Political Situation in India: Thesis of the Workers' and Peasants' Party of India," *Labour Monthly* (London), XI, 3, March, 1929, p. 159.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
70. Quoted by Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*, p. 120, from "Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies," *International Press Correspondence* (English edition) [referred hereafter as *Inprecor*], VIII, December 12, 1928, pp. 1671, 1673.
71. A full report on the workings of the first All-India WPP Conference was given by the British Intelligence, Home Department, Government of India, N.A.I., Home/Pol/1928 F. 18/VII K.W.XI.
72. Quoted by Overstreet and Windmiller, *op. cit.*, p. 129 from Meerut Case Evidence, Exhibit No. P 345.
73. Various authors claim different dates for the formation of the Communist Party in India. Ralph Retzlaff, for example, in "Revisionism and Dogmatism in the CPI," in Robert A. Scalapino, ed., *The Communist Revolution in Asia: Theories, Goals and Achievements* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1965), p. 337, mistakenly dates the founding of the CPI as December, 1928. Muzaffar Ahmad claims that the founding of the CPI should be dated either from the formation of the Indian emigre party in Tashkent in late 1920, or from its reorganization in Moscow in 1921. He maintains that the emigre party and the party later formed inside India were constituent and inseparable units of one and the same party. Muzaffar Ahmad, *The Communist Party of India and Its Formation Abroad* (Calcutta, 1962), pp. 33-34, 64-65, 84-87.
74. Hnithcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India*, p. 44.
75. Bhakta felt that the party should be completely independent of the Comintern and consequently wished to retain the name he had coined, the "Indian Communist Party," to symbolize its distinctively nationalist orientation. His opponents wanted the party to be called the "Communist Party of India" and to retain direct relations with Moscow. See. Hnithcox, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
76. The formative phase of the CPI has been dealt with in detail in Government of India, Home Department, *Communism in India, 1924-1927*, pp. 53-54, and also in Muzaffar Ahmad, *The Communist Party of India, Years of Formation*, pp. 16-21.

77. *The Communist International, Report on India* (Moscow, 1929), p. 473.
78. Spratt, *Blowing up India*, p. 35.
79. For a brief survey of the proceedings in the Sixth International Congress of the Comintern and its effects on Indian Communism, see Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*, pp. 110-121; also Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India*, pp. 108-130.
80. Quoted by David N. Druhe, *Soviet Russia and Indian Communism* (New York, 1959), p. 97, from *Inprecor*, VII, 49, December 12, 1928, p. 1670.
81. *Ibid.*
82. *Judgement, Meerut Conspiracy Case*, I, p. 238.
83. *Ibid.*
84. Spratt, *Blowing up India*, p. 42.
85. As late as in March, 1929, the CPGB tacitly sanctioned C.P.I.'s relation with the WPP by publishing the WPP Thesis in *Labour Monthly* with an encouraging introduction. "The Political Situation in India, . . .", p. 159.
86. R. Page Arnot, *How Britain Rules India* (London, 1929), p. 30.
87. *The Tribune* (Lahore), December 5, 1929, p. 1.
88. Dr. G. M. Adhikari returned on December 10, 1928, after completing his engineering studies in Berlin, where he came under Communist influences.
89. M. R. Masani, *The Communist Party in India*, p. 34. For the attitude of Communists in India at this time, see the article by Philip Spratt, "India on the Eve of Revolt", *Labour Monthly* (London), XI, 5 May, 1929, pp. 285ff. written just before he was arrested in the Meerut Conspiracy Case.
90. The chief supporters of the WPP's continuance were Mirajkar and Usmani. It is significant to note, however, that in planning the next meeting of the CPI, the first item on the agenda was "the danger of having WPP." See, Overstreet and Windmiller, *op. cit.*, p. 135.
91. A detailed account of this meeting is given in Government of India, Home Department, *Communism in India, rev. up to 1935*, pp. 133-135.
92. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Autobiography*, pp. 82-83.
93. Jawaharlal Nehru's own impressions and account of this important participation has been described in his *Autobiography*, pp. 161-165. Also his report to the All India Congress Committee from Switzerland regarding the Brussels Congress is given in full in *Indian Annual Register*, 1927, II, pp. 152ff.
94. Government of India, Home Department, *Communism in India, 1924-1927*, pp. 47-48. This organization was the inspiration of the German youth leader and a Comintern agent, Willi Muenzenberg. He along with Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, an expatriate

Indian nationalist in Europe, were elected joint secretaries of the organization. According to its statutes, the League was to serve as the "union of all persons and organizations which, disregarding their own particular aims, are prepared to lend support in the struggle against Imperialism and for the political and social liberation of all peoples." Because of its broadly-stated objectives the League was able to attract the support of a large number of non-Communist nationalists. See, R. N. Chrew-Hunt, "Willi Muenzenberg," *St. Anthony's Papers, Number IX*, pp. 72-87.

95. According to Michael Brecher, Jawaharlal Nehru's biographer, it was at Brussels that "the goals of national independence and social reforms became linked inextricably in his [Nehru's] conception of future political strategy." (Michael Brecher, *Nehru: A Political Biography* [London, 1959], p. 109.)
96. *Indian Annual Register*, 1927, I, p. 207; also Brecher, *Nehru*, p. 111.
97. Nehru, *Autobiography*, p. 166. The brief four-day visit made a deep impression on his mind. On his return to India, he wrote a series of articles on his impressions of Soviet Russia which were later published as a book entitled *Soviet Russia* (Bombay, 1929). It constituted, as a whole, an eulogy to the Soviet system.
98. Professor J. Bandyopadhyay in his *Indian Nationalism versus International Communism* (Calcutta, 1966), p. 179, points out the similarity of these resolutions to those passed at the Brussels Congress of Oppressed Nationalities as "too strong to be missed."
99. Nehru, *Autobiography*, p. 167.
100. Quoted by Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India*, p. 90.
101. *The Manifesto of the W.P.P. to the Indian National Congress*, (Madras, December, 1927).
102. D. G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi* (Bombay, 1951-54), II, p. 402.
103. Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India*, p. 92.
104. Brecher, *Nehru*, pp. 131-134.
105. Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*, p. 126. Like Nehru, Srinivasa Iyengar was also deeply impressed with the Soviet system. As his biographer points out, the Russian experiment "could not but make a lasting impression" on Iyengar's mind, and that "inevitably he gravitated towards socialism." (K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *S. Srinivasa Iyengar: The Story of a Decade of Indian Politics* [Bangalore, 1939], p. 64.)
106. *Indian Annual Register*, 1928, II, p. 6. The proceedings of the meeting is reported in *ibid.*, pp. 513-516.
107. *Ibid.*, p. 514.
108. Clemens Dutt, "The Indian League for Independence", *Labour Monthly* (London), XI, 1, 1929, pp. 22-28.

109. Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*, p. 126.
110. "The Political Situation in India: Thesis of the Workers' and Peasants' Party of India," *Labour Monthly* (London), XI, 3, March, 1929, pp. 151-161.
111. Overstreet and Windmiller, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-29, quoted from Meerut Case Evidence, Exhibit No. P 334. Emphasis in original.
112. Clemens Dutt, "The Indian League. . .," *Labour Monthly* (London), XI, 1, January, 1929, p. 27.
113. Brecher, *Nehru*, pp. 130-131.
114. Complete proceedings of the Congress session is given in *Indian Annual Register*, 1928, II, pp. 19-48.
115. Quoted by Brecher, *Nehru*, p. 131.
116. *Indian Annual Register*, 1928, II, p. 352.
117. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1928 F.18/VII K.W.XI.
118. *Indian Annual Register*, 1928, II, p. 356. Detailed description of the event is given in *ibid.*, pp. 355-356. Muzaffar Ahmad gives a description of the incident implying that it was a victory of the working class over the "nationalist bourgeoisie." See, Ahmad, *Sannakaler Katha*, pp. 92-93.
119. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1928 F.18/VII K.W.XI.
120. Nehru, *Autobiography*, p. 171.
121. *Indian Annual Register*, 1928, II, pp. 445-452.
122. *Ibid.*, p. 453.
123. *Ibid.*, p. 454.
124. *Ibid.*, pp. 454-455.
125. *Ibid.*, p. 455.
126. *Ibid.*, p. 455.
127. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1928 F.18/VII K.W.XI.
128. L. P. Sinha, *Left-Wing in India*, p. 297.
129. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1928 F.18/VII K.W.XI.
130. Lester Hutchinson, *Conspiracy at Meerut* (London, 1935), p. 3.
131. *The Times* (London), December 9, 1929, p. 11.
132. Quoted by L. P. Sinha, *Left-Wing in India*, p. 231.

CHAPTER II

1. In this connection the three reports entitled *Communism in India*, compiled by the Directors of the Intelligence Bureau, Government of India, are most valuable. They are: Cecil B. Kaye's in 1925 (covering the period 1919-1924), David Petrie's in 1927 (for the period 1924-1927), and that of J. F. Cowgill published in 1935 (for the period 1927-1935). Also of interest are the fortnightly special police reports on Communism in India submitted over the period 1928-1929.
2. Government of India, Home Department, *Communism in India, 1924-1927*, p. 1.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 2. The prosecuting attorney's speeches in the Meerut trial made references to Communism in identical light.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 283.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 286-7.
6. Report of the Special Government Investigator, Mr. R. K. Horton, submitted to the Government of India's Home Department on January 15, 1929, in Subodh Roy, ed., *Communism in India: Unpublished Documents, 1925-1934* (Calcutta, 1972), pp. 105-106.
7. See the formal charges against the accused as declared in the official complaint, filed on March 15, 1929, in C. H. Phillips, ed., *The Evolution of India and Pakistan, 1858-1947* (London, 1962), pp. 258-259; Clemens P. Dutt, *Conspiracy Against the King* (London, 1930), p. 6; Percy Gladding, *The Meerut Conspiracy Case* (London, n.d.), pp. 8-9.
8. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1925 F. 272. No. 6
9. Government of India, Home Department, *Communism in India, 1924-1927*, p. 289.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
11. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1928 F. 18/VII K.W. XI; also Subodh Roy, ed., *Communism in India*, p. 70.
12. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1928 F. 18/VII K.W.1, Subject: Correspondence between H. E. Viceroy and the Secretary of State re: the "Removal from India" Bill.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. See the fortnightly reports on the internal political situation in India for the period. The relevant reports are N.A.I., Home/Pol/1927 F. 32—March, May, and September; Home/Pol/1928 F. 1/28—April, May, June, August, and October.
16. Viceroy to Secretary of State, Telegram "P", July 8, 1928. Private and Personal: No. 443-S. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1928 F. 18/VII K.W.1.
17. As quoted by L. P. Sinha, *The Left-Wing in India*, p. 135 from C. I. Patel, *Life of Vithalbhai Patel*, p. 50.
18. *India in 1928-29*, p. 54. The introduction of the Public Safety Bill and the tremendous reaction it generated in both the official and various non-official circles in India is most interesting and enlightening and can be followed in detail in the *Indian Legislative Assembly Debates* of Autumn Session, 1928 and Winter Session, 1929.
19. *India in 1928-29*, p. 6; *The Times* (London), September 7, 1929, p. 14.
20. *Indian Annual Register*, 1928, II, pp. 171-172; *The Times* (London), September 11, 1928.
21. *Ibid.*

22. *Indian Annual Register*, 1928, II, p. 175. *The Times* (London), September 13, 1928.
23. *Indian Annual Register*, 1928, II pp. 175-176; *The Times* (London), September 13, 1928.
24. *Indian Annual Register*, 1928, II, p. 176. It is interesting to note that Dr. Suhrawardy, a notable Muslim leader agreed with the official view of the Bill and said that visitors from abroad and foreign propagandists acquired exaggerated importance in the eyes of unsophisticated labourers in India and that they were more potent for mischief than any Indian, however educated. (*Ibid*).
25. *Indian Annual Register*, 1928, II, pp. 181-183; *The Times* (London), September 11, 1928, p. 11, and February 6, 1929, p. 3.
26. *Indian Annual Register*, 1928, II, p. 176.
27. Government of India, Home Department, *Communism in India, rev up to 1935*, pp. 130-133; see also Huithcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India*, pp. 153-154.
28. *Indian Annual Register*, 1928, II, pp. 200-201; *India in 1928-29*, pp. 6-7; *The Times* (London), September 25, 1928.
29. Telegram "P" No. 597-S. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1928 F. 18/VII K.W.1.
30. *The Times* (London), September 25, 1928, p. 14; *Indian Annual Register*, 1928, II, pp. 202-203.
31. *Indian Annual Register*, 1928, II, p. 203.
32. Private and personal correspondence between His Excellency the Viceroy and the Governors of Provinces and also the Secretary of State, dated September 28, 1928, and marked "Confidential." N.A.I., Home/Pol/1928 F. 18/VII K.W.2.
33. See the letter of a prominent businessman of Calcutta to the Secretary of State and his reactions to it in his letter dated April 12, 1928. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1928 F. 18/VII K.W. 2. See also the correspondence between the Governors of Bombay and Bengal with the Viceroy, Telegrams dated August 9, 1928, Governor of Bombay to Viceroy; Telegram "P" No. 505-S of August 13, 1928, Viceroy to Governor of Bombay; Viceroy's confidential letters to the Governors of Bombay and Bengal, dated January 18, 1929. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1928 K.W. to F. 18/XVI.
34. Telegram "P" from Secretary of State to Viceroy, dated December 19, 1928, N.A.I., Home/Pol/1928 K.W. to F. 18/XVI.
35. The Bill was re-introduced on February 4, 1929. The full proceeding including Mr. J. Crear's speech moving the introduction of the Bill has been reported in detail in *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, I, pp. 169ff.
36. See Pandit Motilal Nehru's speech as reported in *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, I, pp. 173-76; also *The Times* (London), February 7, 1929.

37. *India in 1928-29*, pp. 67-68; *Indian Annual Register* 1928, II, pp. 194-195, and *ibid.*, 1929, I, p. 18.

38. This was shown in Section 15 (1) of the Trades Disputes Bill which reads:

"Any person who, being employed in a public utility service, goes on strike in breach of contract without having given to his employer, within one month before so striking, not less than fourteen days' previous notice in writing of his intention to go on strike or, having given such notice, goes on strike before the expiry thereof, shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to one month, or with a fine which may extend to fifty rupees, or with both."

(B. F. Bradley, *Trade Unionism in India*, p. 8.) See also *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, I, p. 181.

39. Covered by Section 16(n) and 16(b) of the Trades Disputes Bill. *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, I, p. 181; *India in 1928-29*, p. 68.

40. Section 16(2) of the Trades Disputes Bill. See, Hutchinson, *Conspiracy at Meerut*, pp. 77-78; *India in 1929-30*, pp. 82-83.

41. Bradley, *Trade Unionism in India*, pp. 8-9.

42. *Indian Annual Register*, 1928, II, p. 370. See also the Annual Report for 1928 of the Joint Secretaries to the Indian National Congress in *ibid.*, 1928, II, p. 17.

43. Hutchinson, *op. cit.*, p. 78; Bradley, *op. cit.*, p. 9; *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (Calcutta), August 17, 1928.

44. Quoted from the Report of Jharia Trade Union Congress, Appendix C., p. 45 by Bradley in *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10. The President of the Congress, Mr. M. Daud expressed himself in the following words about the bill:

"By these legal provisions the Government practically intends to stifle all sorts of Labour Movement that are felt necessary to safeguard its interest. If this reactionary law finds a place in the Statutes Book, the Trade Union Movement instead of developing would be gradually eradicated to the best bargain of capital. We caution Government in time that they should weigh the equity and injustice of the measure and should be well advised by impartial and unbiased opinions before they would rush into such a nefarious and reactionary law. . . ."

45. *The Times* (London), April 3, 1929.

46. *India in 1928-29*, p. 9.

47. Quoted in R. P. Dutt, *India Today*, p. 414.

48. From *Bombay Chronicle*, May, 1929, as quoted by R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.*, p. 414.

49. Bradley, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-13.

50. *The Times* (London), January 29, 1929; *India in 1928-29*, p. 61.

51. See Government of India, Home Department, *Communism in India, 1924-1927*; also *Communism in India, rev. to 1935*. Moreover,

there were the quarterly police reports on political activities in India which covered the left front of the country extensively for the period of 1928-29.

52. Government of India, Home Department, *Communism in India, 1924-1927*, p. 292.
53. Telegram "P" No. 562-S. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1928 F.18/VII K.W. I. See also n. 33 above.
54. Telegram "P" No. 2626. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1928 F.18/VII K.W.1.
55. *Ibid.*
56. See H. G. Haig's telegram marked "Very Secret" to F. C. Isenmonger, Director, Intelligence Bureau, dated September 20, 1928, in *ibid.*
57. Isenmonger's "Very Secret" letter to Mr. Haig dated September 20, 1928. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1928 F.18/VII K.W.I.
58. *Ibid.*
59. *Ibid.*
60. *Ibid.*
61. *Ibid.*
62. *Ibid.*
63. *Ibid.* It is very interesting to note the mental attitude of an imperialist ruling class towards the ruled colonial subjects. Time and again official remarks show that rules which under certain circumstances, applied to British citizens, cannot, under similar circumstances, be applied to Indian citizens under British rule. The Secretary of State's remarks to the Viceroy can be remembered in this regard: "a line of criticism which is tenable in the West is not necessarily applicable in the conditions of India." (See n. 34 above.)
64. Telegram "P" No. 597-S. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1928 F.18/ VII K.W.I.
65. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1928 F.18/VII K.W.2.
66. See the secret police report entitled "Events and Developments in the Communist Situation in India from September 1928 to January 1929." N.A.I., Home/Pol/1928 F.18/VII K.W. XI.
67. *Ibid.*
68. *Ibid.*
69. *Ibid.*
70. Viceroy's Correspondence with the Governors of Bombay (Sir Fredrick Sykes) and Bengal (Sir Stanley Jackson) dated January 18, 1929. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1928 K.W. to F.18/XVI.
71. D. Petrie's letter to Mr. Haig marked "Meerut Conspiracy Trial." N.A.I., Home/Pol/1929 F.10/VI.
72. R. K. Horton's report on the feasibility of launching a case to D. Petrie, D.I.B., dated January 15, 1929. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1929 F.10/VI.
73. R. K. Horton's report, *ibid.*

74. All the three extracts in this paragraph are taken from the Viceroy's telegram "P" No. 275-S to the Secretary of State for India, London. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1929 K.W. to F.10/VI.
75. *Ibid.* See D.L.B.'s letter to I.P.I., London, dated December 24, 1928, asking assistance from the Home Authorities in acquiring evidence for the case in England N.A.I., Home/Pol/1929 K.W. to F.10/IV.
76. Telegram "P" No. 648 dated February 21, 1929, from Secretary of State for India, London, to Viceroy (Home Department), New Delhi, regarding "Action against Indian Communists." N.A.I., Home/Pol/1929 K.W. to F.10/V. Similar thoughts were expressed in his second telegram of the same date to the Viceroy which reads:
 "... it seems to me impossible to leave Spratt and Bradley at large while legal authorities pursue their lengthy deliberations to a doubtful conclusion. Moreover, I do not see what disadvantage can arise from applying Public Safety Act to them and getting rid of them and then proceeding with the prosecution of Indians. Indeed it seems to be the only safe thing to do. I beg you to consider this matter further to give Public Safety Bill priority over all other business and to rid yourself of Spratt and Bradley before Bombay again becomes a mass of shambles." (N.A.I., *Ibid.*)
77. Telegram "P" No. 648, *ibid.*
78. See "Legal opinion on the case by Mr. Langford James, Barr-at-Law" dated March 13, 1929. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1929 F.10/IV.
79. Mr. H. G. Haig's (Home Secretary) note to members of Viceroy's Executive Council dated February 20, 1929. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1929 F.10/IV.
80. Telegram "P" No. 927-S. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1929 K.W. to F.10/IV.
81. S. Gopal, *The Viceroyalty of Lord Irwin 1926-1931* (London, 1957), p. 43.
82. Telegram "P" No. 927-S dated February 27, 1929 from Viceroy (Home Department), New Delhi, to Secretary of State for India, London. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1929 K.W. to F.10/VI.
83. Telegram "X" No. 839 (Private and Personal) from Secretary of State for India, London, to Viceroy (Home Department), New Delhi, dated March 7, 1929. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1929 K.W. to F.10/VI.
84. Telegram "P" No. 178-S. N.A.I., *ibid.*
85. *Ibid.*
86. Telegram "P" No. 891 dated March 11, 1929 from Secretary of State for India, London, to Viceroy (Home Department), New Delhi, which reads:
 "Your telegram No. 927-S of 27th ultimo. Conspiracy trial has been considered and I do not think it is necessary that my

- objection should be further pressed." (N.A.I., Home/Pol/1929 F.10/IV.)
87. Sanction Order dated March 14, 1929 signed by Haig, Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1929 F.10/IV.
 88. *Ibid.*, gives the list of accused persons. See also, R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.*, pp. 415-417; Hnithcox, *op. cit.*, p. 156-157 and Joan Beauchamp, *British Imperialism in India* (London, 1934), pp. 148-149.
 89. The exact breakdown was as follows:
Bengal: Kishorilal Ghosh, Calcutta; Gopal Basak, Dacca; Gopendra Chakravarty, Dacca; Dharani Goswami, Mymensingh; Shib Nath Banerjee, Khulna; Phillip Spratt, Calcutta; Ajodhya Prasad, Calcutta; Muzaffar Ahmad, Calcutta; Samsul Huda, Calcutta; Radha Raman Mitra, Burdwan.
Bombay: S. V. Ghate, S. H. Jhabwalla, S. S. Mirajkar, G. M. Adhikari, D. J. Thengdi, K. N. Joglekar, R. S. Nimbur, S. A. Dange, Shaikat Usmani, B. F. Bradley, M. G. Desai, A. A. Aive, G. R. Kasle.
United Provinces: Viswanath Mukherji, Gorakhpur; P. C. Joshi, Allahabad; Gauri Shankar, Meerut; Dharamvir Singh, Meerut; L. R. Kadam, Jhansi.
Punjab: Kedar Nath Sehgal, Abdul Majid, Sohan Singh Josh. (*Indian Annual Register*, 1929. I. p. 65.)
 90. Hutchinson, *Conspiracy at Meerut*, p. 50.
 91. Telegram "P" No. 1911-S. dated June 8, 1929. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1929, K.W. to F.10/IV.
 92. *Ibid.*
 93. The Secretary of State while urging the Viceroy to take severe measures to deal with the increasing industrial unrest in India referred to the views expressed by Indian businessmen and particularly mentioned the opinion of a Calcutta merchant in his letter of December 4, 1928. Subodh Roy, ed., *Communism in India: Unpublished Documents, 1925-1934*, pp. 43-44.
 94. *India in 1928-29*, pp. 5-6.
 95. See, earlier discussions on pp. 66-71.
 96. See "Legal opinion on the case by Mr. Langford James, Bar-at-Law," dated March 13, 1929. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1929 F.10/IV.
 97. The series of correspondence between the Viceroy and the Secretary of State in this respect have been dealt with in detail earlier in this Chapter.
 98. Hutchinson, *Conspiracy at Meerut*, p. 79.
 99. Hutchinson commented: "It is to be presumed that the Government was aware of the findings before they were actually published, and realizing that another big strike in Bombay was inevitable, decided to head the movement by arresting the leadership." (Hutchinson, *Conspiracy at Meerut*, p. 80.)

100. *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, I, p. 76.
101. *Ibid.*
102. N. Somin, "Meerut Trial in India and the Colonial Policy of the Labourites," *Communists* (Bombay), II 3, July-August, 1950, p. 67.
103. See the note from the Home Secretary, Government of India, to the Viceroy, dated February 20, 1929, N.A.I., Home/Pol/1929 F.10/IV. It should be noted here that the Government had reasonable grounds of concern about a jury trial. As Muzaffar Ahmad recounting about a case against Philip Spratt in 1927, said that the only defence the Communists had offered at the time was to appeal and get the case transferred to a High Court session where it was tried by a jury. The jury comprising of eight Indians and one European did acquit the defendant. See, Muzaffar Ahmad, *Amar Jiban O Bharater Communist Party*, pp. 410-411. An interesting point to note here is that this line of defence was suggested to the Communists by M. A. Jinnah who refused to take up the case himself on behalf of Philip Spratt. *Ibid.* So the apprehension on the part of the Government that a jury might have decided the case in favour of the accused, was probably not baseless.
104. As the Viceroy advised the Secretary of State :
 "Bombay and Calcutta have been the two principal scenes of Communist activity. We are definitely of opinion, however, that disturbed conditions of labour at both these places and influences acquired there by Communists make it most undesirable from point of view of preservation of public peace that a case of this magnitude should be tried either in Calcutta or Bombay."
 (Telegram "P" No. 927-S dated February 27, 1929, in Subodh Roy, ed., *Communism in India*, p. 111.)
105. See the Home Secretary's note of February 20, 1929:
 "What is essential is that, if it is decided to institute the case, Government should remain quite firm about its being tried at Meerut, and should not, under any circumstances, agree to its transfer to Bombay or Calcutta, with a view to a trial being held with a jury. For this purpose, it seems desirable before any final decision about instituting a case is taken the concurrence of the Secretary of State in this point."
 (Note of Home Secretary to members of the Viceroy's Executive Council, of February 20, 1929, N.A.I., Home/Pol/1929 F.10/IV.)
 See also the Viceroy's telegram to the Secretary of State, in which he informed the Secretary of State that if Meerut was not selected the venue for the trial, "The case would have to be dropped."
 (Viceroy's Telegram "P" No. 927-S, dated February 27, 1929, to the Secretary of State for India, London, in Subodh Roy, ed., *Communism in India*, p. 112.)

CHAPTER III

1. *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, I, p. 65; *The Times* (London), March 21, 1929, p. 16.
2. *The Times* (London), March 21, 1929, p. 16.
3. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1929 Telegram "R", No. S.D. 533, dated (and received) March 20, 1929.
4. *The Times* (London), March 21, 1929, p. 16 reported:
 "... the secret had been so well kept here [Bombay] that honorary magistrates, who had two days ago been warned for duty this morning, had not any idea what move was contemplated, nor were the troops warned that they would turn out at 3 o'clock this morning."
5. *The Statesman* (Calcutta), March 22, 1929, p. 9; *The Times* (London), March 22, 1929, p. 16; *The Times* (New York), March 22, 1929, p. 6; *The Tribune* (Lahore), March 24, 1929, p. 1.
6. *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, I, p. 19.
7. *The Times* (London), March 22, 1929, p. 16.
8. *The Times* (London), March 23, 1929, p. 14; *The Statesman* (Calcutta), March 23, 1929, p. 9; *The Tribune* (Lahore), March 24, 1929, p. 1.
9. *The Times* (London), March 23, 1929, p. 14; *The Tribune* (Lahore), March 24, 1929, p. 2.
10. *The Statesman* (Calcutta), March 23, 1929, p. 9; *The Tribune* (Lahore), March 26, 1929, p. 4.
11. Protest meetings were held in Lahore (March 22), Delhi (March 23), Amritsar (March 24), Meerut (March 25), Madras (March 26). See, *The Tribune* (Lahore), March 24, 1929, p. 7; March 26, pp. 2, 9; March 27, p. 9; March 29, p. 3.
12. *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, II, pp. 65-66; *The Statesman* (Calcutta), March 21, 1929, p. 9 and March 22, p. 9; *The Tribune* (Lahore), March 23, 1929, p. 1 and March 24, p. 9.
13. For the full text of Mr. Horton's speech in the Assembly, see *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, II, pp. 66-68; also *The Tribune* (Lahore), March 23, 1929, p. 2.
14. *The Times* (London), March 22, 1929, p. 8; *The Times* (New York), March 22, 1929, p. 6; *The Statesman* (Calcutta), March 23, 1929, p. 13; *The Tribune* (Lahore), March 24, 1929, p. 3.
15. *The Times* (London), March 26, 1929, p. 8; *The Statesman* (Calcutta), March 27, 1929, p. 19; *The Tribune* (Lahore), March 28, 1929, p. 3.
16. *The Statesman* (Calcutta), March 29, 1929, p. 10.
17. *The Tribune* (Lahore), March 27, 1929, p. 3.
18. *The Tribune* (Lahore), March 31, 1929, p. 9.
19. H. N. Brailsford, *Rebel India* (New York, 1931), pp. 87-88; see also his *Subject India* (New York, 1943), pp. 177-178, 257-258.

20. *Foreword* (Calcutta), March 26, 1929; *The Tribune* (Lahore), March 29, 1929, p. 12.
21. D. N. Druhe, *Soviet Russia and Indian Communism*, p. 107.
22. Percy Glading, *The Meerut Conspiracy Case*, p. 13; also Clemens Dutt, *Conspiracy Against the King*, p. 14.
23. R. P. Dutt, *India Today*, pp. 422-423.
24. Joan Beauchamp, *British Imperialism in India*, p. 153; also *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, II, pp. 488-489.
25. Hutcheson, *Conspiracy at Meerut*, p. 81.
26. For the full text of the letter, see *Manchester Guardian* (Daily), December 10, 1929, p. 24.
27. *Manchester Guardian*, December 9, 1929, p. 8.
28. *Communists Challenge Imperialism from the Dock* (Calcutta, 1967), p. 307. This is the general statement which was delivered by eighteen prisoners jointly as a part of their defence. All the eighteen members were Communists.
29. Romain Rolland, "For the Meerut Prisoners," in *Meerut Conspiracy Case, March 1929-July 1933* (London, 1933), pp. 1-4.
30. *The Statesman* (Calcutta), March 29, 1929, p. 10; and *The Tribune* (Lahore), March 30, 1929, p. 9.
31. *The Times* (London), April 9, 1929, p. 15.
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.* See also Clemens P. Dutt, "The Class Struggle in India," *Labour Monthly* (London), XI, 7, July 1929, pp. 404ff.; and "S", "The Trial of the Indian Revolutionaries," *Communist International* (Moscow), VI, 14, September 1, 1929, p. 781.
34. *The Times* (London), March 21, 1929, p. 16 and March 23, p. 14; *The Times* (New York), March 21, 1929, p. 10; March 22, 1929, p. 6; and March 23, 1929, p. 12; *The Statesman* (Calcutta), March 23, 1929, p. 9; *The Tribune* (Lahore), March 24, 1929, p. 1.
35. *The Statesman* (Calcutta), April 4, 1929, p. 9.
36. *The Tribune* (Lahore), March 27, 1929, p. 3.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
38. Government of Bombay, *Report on Indian Newspapers* (Bombay), No. 13, 1929, for the period ending March 30, 1929, p. 392. Referred to below as *RIN*.
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 392-393.
40. *Ibid.*, 21, 1929, May 25, p. 631.
41. *Ibid.*, 26, 1929, June 29, pp. 771-772.
42. *Ibid.*, 25, 1929, June 22, pp. 749-750.
43. *Communists Challenge Imperialism from the Dock*, p. 1.
44. Philip Spratt points out that the Communists outside, concerned with the defence of the prisoners, went to Meerut, to consult them and set up what amounted to be a party office there. See, Spratt, *Blowing up India*, p. 53.
45. Solomon A. Lozovsky, "Continuation of the Discussion on the

- Reports of Comrades Kuusinen and Manuilsky," *Inprecor*, IX, 48, 1929, pp. 1037-1039.
46. "Open Letter of the Y.C.I. to the All-India Youth Congress and to All Young Workers and Peasants of India," *Inprecor*, X, 1, 1930, p. 25.
 47. P. Sch. (?), "The Conference of the Workers' and Peasants' Party of India," *Inprecor*, IX, 16, 1929, pp. 319-320; and *ibid.*, IX, 17, 1929, pp. 347-348.
 48. Vyncheslav Molotov, "Report on the Activities of the Delegation of the CPSU in the ECCI," *Inprecor*, IX, 33, 1929, pp. 589-595.
 49. Otto V. Kuusinen was the son of a Finnish tailor and was one of the founders of the Comintern. In the Sixth Comintern Congress he came into prominence with his report on the revolutionary movements in the colonies.
 50. The report was published in *Inprecor*, IX, 33, 1929.
 51. S. A. Lozovsky, "Continuation of the Discussion. . .", *Inprecor*, IX, 48, 1929, pp. 1037-1039.
 52. Otto V. Kuusinen, "The International Situation and the Tasks of the Communist International," *Inprecor*, IX, 40, 1929, pp. 837-851.
 53. V. Molotov, "Report on the Activities of . . .", *Inprecor*, IX, 33, 1929, pp. 589-595.
 54. Clemens Dutt, "The Class Struggle in India," *Labour Monthly* (London), XI, 7, July 1929, pp. 405-416.
 55. S. V. Despande and T. T. Ranadive, both of Bombay, were genuinely noble men. A brilliant student, Despande had joined the non-cooperation movement in the early 20's as a member of the religious-nationalist Arya Samaj Party. However, during the mill strikes of 1928 in Bombay, he underwent a complete ideological metamorphosis, and was attracted towards Communism. Ranadive was also a very brilliant student at the Bombay University. He was inspired to become a Communist by his cousin Dr. G. M. Adhikari. See, *Mahratta* (Poona), June 12, 1935, p. 1, as quoted by Druhe, *Soviet Russia and Indian Communism*, p. 125.
 56. *Workers' Weekly* (Bombay), February 7, 1930. This was the English weekly organ of the Young Workers' League which was organized by Ranadive and Despande as the base of the C.P. in Bombay in early 1930.
 57. The Court of Enquiry was chaired by H. G. Pearson, a judge of the Calcutta High Court.
 58. *Labour Gazette* (Bombay), IX, 1, January, 1929, pp. 57-59.
 59. Haitheox, *Communism and Nationalism in India*, p. 161.
 60. V. B. Karnik, *Indian Trade Unions*, p. 46.
 61. *Report of the Royal Commission*, p. 339.
 62. S. D. Punekar, *Trade Unionism in India*, p. 95.
 63. A resolution of affiliation estimating the strength of the GPU at 54,000 members were at first carried by fifty-one to fifty votes,

but was subsequently defeated by fifty-two to forty-eight on a re-count. The moderates suggested a figure of 6,000 members, but a vote was finally taken on an amendment to the original resolution which put the GKU membership at 40,000. The vote was a tie, but the president, Jawaharlal Nehru, voted in favour of the amendment and the GKU was admitted to the AITUC. See, *Report of the AITUC* (Nagpur, 1929). This was an important decision for voting at the open session was on a proportional basis according to the size of the affiliated unions. Out of a total of 936 votes, the GKU and the G.I.P. Railwaymen's Union, with a claimed membership of 45,000, were allotted 350. The radical section of the Trade Union was thus in control.

64. *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, II, p. 422.
65. *Ibid.*
66. *Labour Gazette* (Bombay), IX, 4, April 1929, pp. 380-382.
67. V. B. Karnik, *Indian Trade Unions*, pp. 49-50.
68. *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, II, p. 363.
69. V. B. Karnik, *Indian Trade Unions*, pp. 49-50.
70. *The Times* (London), December 2, 1929, p. 11.
71. See *Reports of I.L.O.*, p. 129.
72. Punekar, *Trade Unionism in India*, p. 326.
73. *Labour Monthly* (London), IX, 4, April 1929, p. 381; also *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, II, p. 424.
74. See an editorial in the *Modern Review* (Calcutta), XLV, 269, May 1929, p. 630.
75. See *The Tribune* (Lahore), April 10, 1929, p. 3; the *Mahratta* (Poona), April 7, 1929, p. 7; and the *Modern Review* (Calcutta), XLV, 268, April 1929, p. 524.
76. *The Statesman* (Calcutta), March 29, 1929, p. 10.
77. *Young India* (Ahmedabad), April 4, 1929, p. 4.
78. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi, 1970), XLII (October, 1929-February, 1930), pp. 57-58. Also reported in *The Bombay Chronicle*, November 1, 1929; and *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (Calcutta), October 29, 1929. According to these reports, the accused were very surprised to see Gandhi and asked him what he would do for the Meerut case. Gandhi replied: "If it were in my hands I would withdraw charges, as in my scheme of things, holding opinion of any kind would be perfectly permissible." (*Ibid.*)
79. *Collected Works of Gandhi*, XLII, pp. 105-106.
80. *The Tribune* (Lahore), March 24, 1929, p. 5.
81. Brecher, *Nehru*, p. 136.
82. C. H. Philips, ed., *The Evolution of India and Pakistan, 1858-1947*, p. 259.
83. *Ibid.*, p. 260.
84. J. M. Sen Gupta's interview to *Free Press of India* (Calcutta) as reported in *The Tribune* (Lahore), March 23, 1929, p. 1.

85. *The Tribune* (Lahore), March 24, 1929, p. 2.
86. *The Statesman* (Calcutta), March 23, 1929, p. 9.
87. *The Tribune* (Lahore), March 26, 1929, p. 9.
88. *The Statesman* (Calcutta), March 23, 1929, p. 9.
89. For details see *The Tribune* (Lahore), March 31, 1929, p. 9.
90. Government of Bengal, *Report on Newspapers and Periodicals in Bengal* (Calcutta), 13, 1929, for the week ending March 30, 1929, p. 175. Referred to below as RNPB.
91. RNPB, 13, 1929, March 30, p. 176.
92. *Ibid.*
93. *Ibid.*, 14, 1929, April 6, pp. 191-192. For similar comments and critiques of the Meerut arrest by the various press in Bengal, see, *Ibid.*, pp. 175-177, 191-192, 205, 261-262.
94. *The Tribune* (Lahore), March 23, 1929, p. 8.
95. RIN, 13, 1929; March 30, p. 386.
96. *Ibid.*
97. *Ibid.*
98. *Ibid.*, p. 387.
99. *Ibid.*, p. 388.
100. *Ibid.*, p. 390.
101. *Ibid.*, p. 393.
102. *Ibid.*, p. 396.
103. RIN, 14, 1929, April 6, pp. 418-419.
104. Several other critical comments of the Meerut arrest of similar nature as had appeared in the Indian newspapers and journals of the period can be found in RIN, pp. 385-396, 417-421, 456-458.
105. See the newspapers reports in *The Tribune* (Lahore) and *The Statesman* (Calcutta), as well as RNPB and RIN for the rest of the year 1929. However, once the preliminary enquiry and the actual trial proceedings began the prominent Indian newspapers covered the court proceedings in details usually without any editorial comments.
106. See the reports on the various provincial Youth Conferences held at different parts of India between September and December, 1929, in *Indian Annual Register*, II, 1929, pp. 401-412. Also of interest is Jawaharlal Nehru's presidential address at the AITUC meeting at Nagpur on November 30, 1929 (*ibid.*, pp. 424-429). Jawaharlal Nehru, Srinivas Iyengar and Vithalbhai Patel spoke at the All-India Students Convention at Lahore on December 30, 1929. (See the report in *ibid.*, pp. 413-423.) Jawaharlal Nehru's presidential speech at the annual Congress Party session at Lahore also made no reference to the Meerut prisoners. (*ibid.*, pp. 293-295).
107. Muzaffar Ahmad's introduction to *Communists Challenge Imperialism from the Dock*, pp. vii-viii.
108. M. V. Ramana Rao, *A Short History of the Indian National Congress* (Delhi, 1959), p. 127.

109. Jawaharlal Nehru was nominated as the President on Gandhi's instance and with his support. It was one of Gandhi's brilliant moves to effect a compromise between the young left group of Congress with the moderate conservative factions of the Party. As Michael Brecher comments:
 "The consensus among prominent Congressmen interviewed on this point was that Gandhi saw in Nehru the ideal instrument to achieve two basic objectives: namely to divert the radical youth away from Communism and to secure their allegiance to the Congress; and to wean Nehru himself from the drift to the far Left. Nehru was then in his extremist phase, a visionary, critical of the moderate policies of the Congress and strongly attracted to the Marxist ideal. As formal head of the party, he would become aware of the necessity of compromise in order to reconcile the various factions in his polyglot movement. This would take the edge off his extreme leftism." (Brecher, *Nehru*, pp. 137-138.)
110. Vapal P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India* (Princeton, 1957), p. 38.
111. The Simon Commission Report issued the next year, however, reflected a more conservative outlook. It contained no reference to the possible attainment of Dominion Status by India.
112. AICC, *Indian National Congress: Report of the 44th Annual Session Held at Lalpat Rai Nagar, Lahore on December 25-31, 1929* (Lahore, 1930), Appendix I, p. xvi.
113. Alan Campbell-Johnson, *Viscount Halifax* (London, 1941), pp. 227-230.
114. See, Brecher, *Nehru*, p. 140.
115. *Report of the 44th Annual Session*, p. 130.
116. The full text of Jawaharlal Nehru's Presidential address is to be found in *Indian Annual Register*, II, 1929, pp. 288-297.
117. *Ibid.*
118. AICC, *Congress Bulletin*, 3, February 7, 1930, p. 19.
119. S. Gopal, *The Viceroyalty of Lord Irwin 1926-1931*, pp. 58-62, 69-71.
120. See, Haitheox, *Communism and Nationalism in India*, p. 138.
121. T. Walter Wnllbank, *A Short History of India and Pakistan*, (New York, 1965), p. 168.
122. Brecher, *Nehru*, p. 114.
123. *Ibid.*
124. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
125. Molotov, "Report on the Activities. . .", pp. 589-595.
126. "Draft Platform of Action of the C.P. of India," *Imprecor*, X, 58, 1930, pp. 1218-1222.
127. Government of India, Home Department, *Communism in India*, rev. up to 1935, pp. 169-170.

128. Windmiller and Overstreet, *Communism in India*, p. 146.

CHAPTER IV

1. *Report of the Bombay Strike Enquiry Committee, 1928-29* (Bombay, 1929), p. 166.
2. R. P. Dutt, *India Today*, p. 415.
3. *RIN*, 13, 1929, March 30, p. 401.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 402.
5. *RIN*, 14, 1929, April 6, p. 437.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 437-438. For other press comments on the Lawrence Enquiry Committee's Report, see *RIN*, 1929, pp. 401-405, 437-438, 467.
7. *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, I, p. 252.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 253. For the full text of the President's speech, see *Ibid.*, pp. 252-253.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 259. The full text of Mr. Crerar's statement can be found in *Ibid.*, pp. 258-259.
10. *India in 1929-30*, pp. 82-86; and *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, I, pp. 266-270.
11. *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, I, pp. 21, 270. Complete text of the Viceroy's address is given in *Ibid.*, pp. 270-272.
12. For the Viceroy's speech on the occasion see *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, I, pp. 80-85; and *The Times* (London), April 14, 1929.
13. *RIN*, 17, 1929, April 27, p. 536.
14. *RNPB*, 16, 1929, April 20, p. 227.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 228.
16. *The Tribune* (Lahore), April 17, 1929, p. 8.
17. *RIN*, 16, 1929, April 20, p. 502. Similar comments ranging from mild to bitter criticism of the Public Safety Ordinance were expressed in most of the country's leading national newspapers. For more such comments, see, *RNPB*, 1929, pp. 227-229, 244-245, 269-270; and also *RIN*, 1929, pp. 473-476, 501-503, 536.
18. The proceedings on the Trades Disputes Bill in the Assembly can be followed in detail in *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, I, pp. 181, 255-257, 259-261, 264-266.
19. *RIN*, 16, 1929, April 20, p. 507.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *RIN*, 15, 1929, April 13, pp. 477-478. For other press comments on the Trades Disputes Act, see *RIN*, 1929, pp. 443-444, 473-478, 506-507.
22. The Commission consisted of: John Henry Whitley (Chairman); V. S. Srinivasa Sastri; Sir Ellice Victor Sassoon; Sir Ibrahim Rahimtoola; Sir Alexander Robertson Murray; A. G. Clow; Kabeer-ud-Din Ahmed; Ghanshyam Das Birla; John Cliff; N. M.

- Joshi; Diwan Chaman Lal and Beryl Millicent le Poer Power. *Report of the Royal Commission on Labour*, p. 1.
23. *Report of the Royal Commission, His Majesty's Command*, pp. i-ii.
 24. *Ibid.*, p. 518.
 25. *Ibid.*, p. 348.
 26. The records of the proceedings at the Sessions Court were published in detail and are available in eleven volumes. See, *Proceedings of the Meerut Conspiracy Case* (Meerut, 1929), 11 volumes.
 27. A remand is the legal proceeding undertaken by the police to formally send back a prisoner or accused into custody, as to wait further proceedings. This was required by law to hold the accused in jail till their trial started in Court.
 28. N.A.L. Home/Pol/1929 F.10/IV. Home Department Political Branch. Draft D-O Letter No. D. 347. Pol. Dated April 29, 1929.
 29. *Ibid.*, Telegram "R" No. 1621-S, dated May 7, 1929.
 30. *Ibid.*, Telegram "P" No. 1692, dated (and received) May 28, 1929.
 31. For reports on the various bail applications and the resulting hearings, see *The Times* (London), April 6, 1929, p. 10; April 19, 1929, p. 16; April 24, 1929, p. 15; April 30, 1929, p. 15; May 13, 1929, p. 16; May 31, 1929, p. 11; June 3, 1929, p. 15; August 24, 1929, p. 9; August 26, 1929, p. 11.
 32. See the above reports in *The Times* (London); also see the *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, I, p. 66.
 33. The full text of the prosecuting counsel's opening speech was reprinted in the *Labour Monthly* (London), January, February, March, 1930; also in the *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, I, pp. 68-77.
 34. *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, I, p. 70.
 35. *Ibid.*
 36. C. P. Dutt, *Conspiracy Against the King*, p. 8; also P. Glading, *The Meerut Conspiracy Case*, p. 10.
 37. *The Tribune* (Lahore), December 4, 1929, p. 2.
 38. See "The Speech of the Prosecutor in the Meerut Case," Part 2, in *Labour Monthly* (London), XII, 2, February 1930, p. 105.
 39. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
 40. *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, I, p. 69; also "S," "Trial of the Indian Revolutionaries," *Communist International* (Moscow), VI, 14, September 1, 1929, p. 787.
 41. *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, I, p. 75; also, "S," "Trial of . . .", *loc. cit.*, p. 788.
 42. *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, I, p. 68.
 43. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
 44. *Ibid.*, p. 69; also see "The Speech of the Prosecutor in the Meerut Case," Part 1, in *Labour Monthly* (London), XII, 1, January 1930, p. 26.
 45. *Communists Challenge Imperialism from the Dock*, p. viii.

46. *The Times* (London), December 11, 1929, p. 13; *The Tribune* (Lahore), December 11, 1929, p. 1.
47. *The Tribune* (Lahore), December 10, 1929, p. 2.
48. *The Times* (London), November 14, 1929, p. 13.
49. *Ibid.*, November 28, 1929, p. 13.
50. *Ibid.*, and November 29, 1929, p. 13.
51. For details of the Magistrate's judgement, see *The Times* (London), January 15, 1930, p. 13; and January 16, 1930, p. 2.
52. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1929 F.10/IV. In the Court of the Additional District Magistrate of Meerut. Case no. 1 of 1929 (Section 121-A I.P.C.) King-Emperor Vs. Philip Spratt and Others. Written statement of Chowdhury Dharamvir Singh, an accused in the above case.
53. C. P. Dutt, *Conspiracy Against the King*, p. 7; also *The Times* (London), July 17, 1929, p. 15.
54. *The Times* (London), January 28, 1930, p. 14.
55. *Ibid.*; and also, C. P. Dutt, *Conspiracy Against the King*, pp. 7-8.
56. *The Times* (London), February 1, 1930, p. 12. According to the Indian judicial system, after a preliminary hearing before a Magistrate is held, the accused are committed for trial before a formal judge. In this case, however, Mr. Yorke, an I.C.S., was appointed as an "additional sessions judge" by the Government to hear the case. Under the provisions of the law prevailing in Meerut five nominated lay assessors sat with him throughout the case to "assist him." They were not in any way comparable to a jury, because the sole responsibility for both the verdict and the sentence lay with the judge. Under the Indian Criminal Law, their function was to assist him to decide any questions of fact arising during a trial, but, whatever attention he might have paid to their advice during the trial, he largely disregarded it when it came to the question of the verdict. See, *Meerut Conspiracy Case*, by a Barrister at Law, (London, 1933), p. 11.
57. *The Times* (London), March 18, 1931, p. 12. Leaving out printed books and pamphlets, the written documents alone made up seven volumes or a total of seven thousand pages of written evidence. Further the prosecution made use of many files of newspapers, both Indian and foreign, as part of their evidence.
58. Mr. Langford James, the original Chief Crown Counsel died in May, 1930 and his place was taken by Mr. M. I. Kemp. *The Times* (London), January 17, 1933, p. 17; *The Tribune* (Lahore), January 18, 1933, pp. 1-2.
59. Four of the assessors gave their verdict as follows: Spratt, Bradley, Ghate, Mirajkar, Joglekar, Nimbkar, Dange, Usmani, Adhikari, Muzaffar Ahmad, Goswami, Chakravarty, Basak, A. Prasad, Josh, Majid and Joshi—were found unanimously guilty. Thengdi, Hutchinson, Huda, Mitra, Ghose, Gauri Shankar and Kadam were found not guilty by all four. Jhabwalla, Alve, Kalse, Sehgal, Desai,

- and Mukherjee—were found not guilty by three to one. The fifth assessor declared that all were more or less guilty but not under section 121-A of the I.P.C. All five assessors were Indians. *The Statesman* (Calcutta), January 17, 1933, pp. 9-10.
60. Several others were sentenced to transportation for various terms but the effect of the convictions was imprisonment under hard-labour conditions.
 61. *The Times* (London), January 17, 1933, p. 9.
 62. *The Statesman* (Calcutta), August 4, 1933, p. 9; *The Tribune* (Lahore), August 5, 1933, p. 1.
 63. Compiled from *The Times* (London), January 17, 1933, p. 9, and August 3, 1933, p. 9. See also *Communists Challenge Imperialism*, pp. xi-xiv.
 64. Government of India, Home Department, *Communism in India*, rev. up to 1935, p. 140.
 65. *Communists Challenge Imperialism*, pp. ix-x.
 66. *The Times* (London), January 17, 1933, p. 12; also, *The Tribune* (Lahore), January 18, 1933, p. 2.
 67. Barrister at Law, *Meerut Conspiracy Case*, p. 12.
 68. Discussed in detail in Chapter II.
 69. *Communists Challenge Imperialism*, pp. 303-305.
 70. C. P. Dutt, *Conspiracy Against the King*, p. 7.
 71. Barrister at Law, *Meerut Conspiracy Case*, p. 11; also, *Communists Challenge Imperialism*, pp. 301-302.
 72. *Communists Challenge Imperialism*, p. 302.
 73. Barrister at Law, *Meerut Conspiracy Case*, p. 14.
 74. Muzaffar Ahmad's introduction to *Communists Challenge Imperialism*, p. ii.
 75. The General Statement was later published in a book form entitled *Communist Challenge Imperialism from the Dock* which has been referred to above.
 76. K. L. Gauba, *Famous and Historic Trials* (Lahore, 1946), pp. 15-16.
 77. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
 78. *The Meerut Prisoners' Reply* (London, 1931), pp. 44-45.
 79. For the statements of other defendants, see, *ibid.*, pp. 6-46; Gauba, *Famous and Historic Trials*, pp. 15-17; and R. P. Dutt, *India Today*, pp. 418-421.
 80. See pp. 96-97 in Chapter III.
 81. See Soumyendranath Tagore, "Meerut," in *Imprecor*, XIV, 34, August 4, 1933, p. 748.
 82. R. P. Dutt, *India Today*, p. 423. It is interesting to compare this criticism by the British Labour Party with the fact that the trial was held almost entirely while a Labour Government was in office. However, by 1933, when the judgement was delivered and this.

statement was made they were out of power and overly critical of the trial.

83. Hutchinson, *Conspiracy at Meerut*, p. 179.
84. *The Times* (London), July 18, 1933, p. 8. See also some of the comments of other Labour Party members in *The Statesman* (Calcutta), January 20, 1933, p. 9.
85. As reported in *The Tribune* (Lahore), August 6, 1933, p. 9.
86. *Manchester Guardian*, January 17, 1933, p. 8.
87. *Communists Challenge Imperialism*, p. xiv.
88. Romain Rolland, "For the Meerut Prisoners: Against Imperialist Terror," in *Meerut Conspiracy Case, March 1929 - July 1933*, pp. 3-4.
89. Harold J. Laski's introduction to Lester Hutchinson's *Conspiracy at Meerut*, pp. 7-8.
90. As quoted in R. P. Dutt, *India Today*, p. 423, fn. 1.
91. *The Christian Century* (Chicago), February 22, 1933, p. 267.
92. Muzaffar Ahmad's introduction to *Communists Challenge Imperialism*, p. xiii. Dr. Nilas Nath Katju represented the defendants in their appeals to the Allahabad High Court.
93. *Manchester Guardian*, August 4, 1933, p. 8.
94. See the comments made by the *New Chronicle* (London) and *The Daily Herald* (London) as quoted in *The Tribune* (Lahore), August 6, 1933, p. 9.
95. See discussions in this connection in Chapter II, pp. 77-81 above. For instance, the note from the Home Secretary, Government of India, to the Viceroy, dated February 20, 1929 stated:
 "We could not however, take the chance of submitting the case to a jury. However good the case, there could be no assurance that a jury would convict, and we cannot put the case into Court unless we are convinced that it will result in conviction." (N.A.I., Home/Pol/1929 F. 10/IV.)
 The Viceroy expressed similar feelings in his letter of February 27, 1929, to the Secretary of State; see, *ibid.*, Telegram "P" No. 927-S, dated February 27, 1929.

CHAPTER V

1. See discussions in this connection in Chapter II, pp. 65ff., above.
2. This prospect was explicitly conveyed by Mr. H. G. Halg, Secretary, Home Department, Government of India, to Mr. Langford James, the Chief Prosecutor, in his letter of April 29, 1929, in which he discussed some of the anticipated consequences of the Meerut trial:
 "From the political point of view it would be an advantage to be able to convince in general as early as possible that Communism is not the kind of movement that should receive the sympathy of the Nationalists. The opposition to the Public

Safety Bill has created artificial and false atmosphere, and we want to set that right as soon as possible."

(Draft D.O. Letter, No. D. 347. Poll. Dated April 29, 1929, in Subodh Roy, ed., *Communism in India*, p. 95.) It is interesting to note the answer given to this letter by Mr. Langford James in which he assures Mr. Haig that, "we do our best when occasion offers (an application for bail) to inform the public that this is a Moscow case and nothing to do with Nationalism." (*Ibid.*, p. 96.)

3. See the opening speech of the Crown Counsel, Mr. Langford James, in *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, I, pp. 68-77. This was to a great extent an attempt to influence public opinion against Communism.
4. As Mr. Haig, in his letter to Mr. Langford James wrote:
 "A judicial pronouncement is required as early as possible, which will enable us to deal with further manifestations of Communism and to prevent the Communist movement recovering from the blow which the arrest of the leaders has dealt it. We hope to be able, on the result of this case, to make further Communist activities both difficult and dangerous for those who wish to indulge in them. But the kind of action we have in contemplation cannot be taken until we have the clear pronouncement of a Court that these activities are illegal."
 (Draft D.O. Letter No. D. 347. Poll. Dated April 29, 1929, in Subodh Roy, ed., *Communism in India*, pp. 94-95.)
5. Viceroy's Telegram "P" No. 257-S, dated January 19, 1929, to the Secretary of State for India, London, in Subodh Roy, ed., *Communism in India*, p. 108.
6. *Ibid.*
7. L. P. Sinha, *The Left-Wing in India*, p. 238; the information was provided by Mohit Sen, a prominent Indian Communist to the author in the course of an interview. The statement was also verified by Muzaffar Ahmad during my talk with him in Calcutta, in January, 1973.
8. As quoted by Michael Brecher, *Nehru, A Political Biography*, p. 136.
9. R. P. Dutt, *India Today*, p. 410; also V. B. Karnik, *Indian Trade Unions: A Survey*, p. 260, Appendix II. The original source not mentioned in either.
10. *India in 1929-30*, p. 13.
11. J. S. Mathur, *Indian Working Class Movement* (Allahabad, 1964), p. 27.
12. L. P. Sinha, *Left-Wing in India*, p. 238. No original source mentioned.
13. For an open attack on Gandhi, Nehru, Subhas Bose, and other nationalists, see, *Communists Challenge Imperialism*, pp. 82-94, 267-270.

14. Saumyendranath Tagore, *Historical Development of the Communist Movement in India* (Calcutta, 1944), pp. 20-21.
15. Philip Spratt, *Blowing up India*, pp. 51-52.
16. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1934 F.109, D.7249/Poil, dated October 30, 1933, as quoted in Subodh Roy, ed., *Communism in India*, p. 231.
17. N.A.I., Home/Pol/1934 F.7/XVI.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Subodh Roy, *Communism in India*, p. 463. Appendix III.
20. Saumyendranath Tagore, *Historical Development of the Communist Movement in India*, p. 21; Philip Spratt, *Blowing up India*, p. 52.
21. Muzaffar Ahmad, *Sauakater Katha*, pp. 65-66.
22. Harold J. Laski's introduction to Lester Hutchinson's *Conspiracy at Meerut*, p. 8.
23. Spratt, *Blowing up India*, p. 35.
24. A. A. Purcell and J. Hallsworth, *Report on Labour Conditions in India* (London, 1928), p. 11.
25. See, *Report of the Royal Commission*, pp. 335, 339.
26. As quoted in Barrister at Law, *Meerut Conspiracy Case*, p. 7.
27. The Member in question was Sir James Simpson. The incident was reported in the *Indian Annual Register*, 1928, II, p. 202.
28. Muzaffar Ahmad wrote in 1966:
 "When Jawaharlal Nehru met us first in the Meerut District Jail after our arrests, he said, 'How little do these accused persons know about the Communist International! I know a lot more than they.' My reason for saying all this here is that there was a possibility of implicating Jawaharlal Nehru also in the Meerut Conspiracy Case. A Government which could arrest an innocent person like Chaudhuri Dharmvir Singh could easily lay its hands upon a man like Jawaharlal."
 (See, Muzaffar Ahmad's introduction to *Communists Challenge Imperialism from the Dock*, p. vii.)
29. A. C. Underwood, *Contemporary Thought in India* (London, 1930), p. 91.
30. *The Times* (London), August 31, 1929, p. 9.

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[My informal talk with several other members (former and present) of the CPI, CPI (Marxist), CPI (Marxist-Leninist), and other political parties have been most helpful in this study.]

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